

MILK AND BLOOD: MATERNAL FRAMEWORKS IN  
OLD FRENCH LITERATURE

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I hereby certify that this PhD thesis is all my own work.



## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

The thesis considers the depiction and function of maternal characters within late twelfth and thirteenth-century French texts, a topos which varies according to genre. The main generic category of the study is that of the *chanson de geste*, with additional chapters on romance, and on didactic literature pertaining to women. The ideological constructs of contemporary religious and medical teachings on the feminine/ maternal provide an introduction and a background to the study, while modern feminist theory is used as a methodological and critical approach.

The first chapter examines the inherent ambiguity of didactic texts, including those by Etienne de Fougères, Raymond Lull and Philippe de Novarre. The prescription of a code of ideal female conduct is here implicitly and constantly undercut by the sexualisation of the female body through the very strategies of writing which would seek to contain it, a problem which appears notably in Robert de Blois' *Chastoiement des Dames*. The authoritative stance taken by these texts is haunted by a fear that the very prescription of an ideal of behaviour may be symptomatic of failure, a disquiet also given voice by the many negative examples they cite. A tension is thus produced between the projected containment of female sexuality and the intimation that didactic writing always, by form and by content, undercuts its own prescriptive enterprise.

Chapter 2 studies the role of the mother in the romance texts of *Guillaume de Dole*, *Perceval* and *La Manekine*. The maternal image here appears limited and confined, reflecting the concerns of didactic literature in the emphasis placed on female chastity, presenting the mother as a religious symbol, or simply placing her as peripheral to the masculine discourse of the text. Chapters 3-5 then compare the depiction of maternal characters in the *chanson de geste*. Although *chansons de geste* (e.g. the *Crusade Cycle* and *Berte as Grans Piés*) and romance both appear to subscribe to an idealised and ideologically-conforming model of femininity, in the *chanson de geste* constructions of the maternal are often undercut by the narrative disquiet which these can produce. Framing and containing the maternal character within the body appears inherently problematic and unstable, as with the hero's mother in *Raoul de Cambrai*, while the destabilising ambiguity of the maternal influence in reproduction and familial structure is highlighted by *Ami et Amile* and *Parise la Duchesse*. In these texts the mother functions as an agent in social and narrative frameworks far more complex than a linear genealogy of fathers and sons in which her role would be that of a silent, passive and unacknowledged supplement. It is the epic's emphasis on intertextual and familial connections -- in contrast with the enclosed, self-limiting reproduction of the romance -- that allows for this more multi-faceted maternal function. The genealogical imperative of the *chanson de geste* is seen to afford greater possibility for significant maternal input and for greater play in the genre's articulation of the maternal, on both the syntactic and the semantic levels of textual representation. Indeed, the positioning of the mother as nexus between the signifying units of father and son within the narrative of lineage is of prime strategic importance. Her 'silence' within the symbolic structure of society and language, or of text, destabilises and troubles any vision of a self-sufficient, monolithic language adequate to the representation of a world and a history. This recognition of the possibility of a maternal influence, and the textual space which this allows to the maternal voice, thus resists and restructures the social and rhetorical conventions which figure femininity in the medieval text.

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## PREFACE

The position of women in medieval society has been the focus of a range of recent historical studies, those by Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot, and by Shulamith Shahar being prominent examples.<sup>1</sup> The depiction of women in medieval literature is also a field which has generated considerable interest, allied as this is to the development of gender theory in the context of medieval studies, and a considerable amount of work has been carried out in this area.<sup>2</sup> The present study aims to extend the scope of the above by focusing in particular on the woman in her role as mother in the literature of late twelfth and thirteenth-century France. The sole comparable published work is that by Doris Desclais Berkvam, *Enfance et maternité dans la littérature française des XIIe et XIIIe siècles* (Paris: Champion, 1981), which covers a wide range of romance and *chanson de geste* texts.<sup>3</sup> Berkvam's study, however, considers the mother primarily in relation to her child. She thus presents a comprehensive picture of the mother-child relationship from conception through childhood, and emphasises the medieval attitude towards, and treatment of the infant as these appear in the text. The present study differs considerably in its aim and focus. Rather than childhood and maternity in general, it examines the depiction and function of the specifically maternal character in didactic texts, romance, and *chanson*

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<sup>1</sup> Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot (eds.), *Histoire des femmes en Occident*, 4 vols (Paris: Plon, 1991); and Shulamith Shahar, *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages*, trans. by Chaya Galai (London: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> The studies in this area are too numerous to mention, but see in particular Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), and Roberta Krueger, *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in Old French Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Note should also be taken of Dorothea Kullmann, *Verwandtschaft in epischer Dichtung. Untersuchungen zu den französischen 'chansons de geste' und Romanen des 12. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1992). While providing a comprehensive study of kinship relations in both romance and *chanson de geste*, Kullmann, perhaps inevitably, concentrates on the bonds between male kin, although not to the complete exclusion of women.

*de geste*, drawing on gender studies, and on literary and feminist criticism. Since the scope of such a study is potentially vast, this dissertation does not aim to provide a complete overview of depictions of the mother in Old French literature, or to present a full comparative study of the different genres in which she appears. Instead, it focuses on texts which provide a particular insight into the conception of the woman as mother from the late twelfth to the late thirteenth centuries, and for how this role shapes the narratives in which these characters figure. Generic differences are, however, significant; a prime instance being the more frequent portrayal of the mother in the *chanson de geste*, and the more substantial nature of her role here. The space which the *chanson de geste* opens up to the mother substantially affects the narrative construction of maternal character and our perception of the mother's significance in the genre. In view of this, the major part of this study is devoted to the mother in the epic (Chapters 3-5), with additional chapters on romance (Chapter 2), and on didactic literature pertaining to women (Chapter 1).

An introduction and background to the study is provided by twelfth and thirteenth-century religious and medical teachings on women and the maternal, as the ideologies which these project relate particularly to a view of women which concentrates on the female body. The woman as mother and the importance of her nurturing role is significant in both disciplines, whether referring to the maternal ideal, the Virgin Mary, or to the role played by maternal milk and blood in the generation and sustenance of an infant. My approach to this key aspect of the imagery of the female body and its relation to the masculine symbolic also draws on the work of critics such as Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray. The Introduction provides the context against which the texts are read and outlines the themes which frame their study.

The first chapter examines the inherent ambiguity of didactic texts, including those by Etienne de Fougères, Raymond Llull and Philippe de Novarre, which set up a code of

ideal female conduct. This is then implicitly and constantly undercut by the sexualisation of the female body through the very strategies of writing which would seek to contain it, a problem which appears notably in Robert de Blois' *Chastoiement des Dames*. The authoritative stance taken by these texts is haunted by a fear that the very prescription of an ideal of behaviour may be symptomatic of failure, a disquiet also given voice by the many negative examples they cite. A tension is thus produced between the projected containment of female sexuality and the intimation that didactic writing always, by form and by content, undercuts its own prescriptive enterprise. The circumscription of female behaviour prior to marriage works to the exclusion of the mother, an emphasis which is reflected in the romance of *Guillaume de Dole*, by Jean Renart, considered in Chapter 2. The woman as mother does appear in *Perceval*, by Chrétien de Troyes, and Philippe de Rémi's *La Manekine*, but the maternal role is here either foreclosed by the removal of the mother from the narrative, or sidelined by the emphasis on woman as religious sign, mediatrix between man and God.

Romance and *chanson de geste* both appear to subscribe to an idealised and ideologically-conforming model of femininity, but in the *chanson de geste* constructions of the maternal are often undercut by the narrative disquiet which these can produce. Framing and containing the maternal character within the body appears inherently problematic and unstable, as with the hero's mother in *Raoul de Cambrai*, while the destabilising ambiguity of the maternal influence in reproduction and in familial structure is highlighted by *Ami et Amile* and *Parise la Duchesse*. These texts open up the question of maternal significance, for the model of motherhood which they construct troubles the notion of the mother as a fixed and stable concept. In the *chanson de geste* the mother is acknowledged as having a significant role in reproduction and thus in the continuation of the lineage. Her depiction as maternal character, however, questions the nature of this role and the extent to which the mother is contained and bounded by her reproductive function. The representation of

the mother is not, therefore, circumscribed or closed down in the same way that it would appear to be in the didactic or romance texts. Rather, the *chanson de geste* posits the existence of a maternal space and a voice capable of restructuring the notion of the maternal over the course of a given work.

## INTRODUCTION

In his influential essay, *Mâle Moyen Age*, Georges Duby identifies what he sees as a notable shift in the kinship structures of noble families from a broad, horizontal formation to a vertical lineage articulated over time:

Antérieurement, au tournant des IX<sup>e</sup> et X<sup>e</sup> siècles, les hommes de la très haute aristocratie se trouvaient pris dans un groupe de parenté flou, qui apparaît comme une agglomération de 'proches', où les alliances avaient au moins autant de poids et de résonance psychologique que les filiations; après cette date, au contraire, les hommes sont strictement intégrés dans un lignage, dans une lignée de caractère résolument agnatique.<sup>1</sup>

This reorientation has been linked by R. Howard Bloch with the structural and narrative organisation of the *chanson de geste*, a genre which he perceives as embodying the literary form concurrent with this new articulation of social relations.<sup>2</sup> Although the literature of a particular era must be read as product of its own socio-historical context, Bloch would appear to take this a stage further, conflating language, text and context to produce an anthropology founded on literary evidence: 'The literary text represents a privileged forum for the realization of such tensions [of conflict and violence] and, in fact, a key to the anthropology of the age'.<sup>3</sup> Sarah Kay's recent study of the generic relations between *chanson de geste* and romance presents an alternative view to that of Bloch. She regards the two genres as existing in a

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<sup>1</sup> Georges Duby, *Mâle Moyen Age. De l'amour et autres essais* (Paris: Flammarion, 1988), p. 140.

<sup>2</sup> See R. Howard Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the Middle Ages* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 64-91. Bloch seeks to draw a parallel between the 'etymological' grammar and kinship structures of the Middle Ages. He extends this study into the genealogical structuring of literary genres, the aspect of his work which is of most relevance to this present study. Sarah Kay is particularly sceptical of this notion of a 'literary anthropology', owing primarily to the temporal distance between the modern critic of medieval literature and the text. 'To Bloch's claims for medieval literature as anthropology's great opportunity, I should therefore prefer the formulation that texts furnish a privileged space in which to explore some of the issues that are at stake in the representation of political or social relations' (*The 'Chansons de geste' in the Age of Romance. Political Fictions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 18).

<sup>3</sup> Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*, p. 14.



synchronic and dialectical relationship with each other, but also with their social context. The notion of repression and containment is here significant. In addition to foregrounding certain aspects of social relations, text and narrative can also function as a blanketing device, foreclosing upon other, less acceptable, elements and relegating them to the 'political unconscious' of the text.<sup>4</sup> Bloch's homologisation of the social and the textual, upon which the edifice of his argument is constructed, is thereby thrown open to question. This has considerable importance for his reading of the *chanson de geste*. He states: 'in the *chanson de geste* more than anywhere else lineage serves to organize an entire literary mode', here reducing both '*chanson de geste*' and 'lineage' to a verticality of form, a set of genealogical building-blocks which present a unified structure of representation in both social and textual terms.<sup>5</sup> This linear demarcation, this bounding within the vertical, is not only opposed to, but is also closed against, the horizontal, the multiple and the peripheral.

The term 'lineage' itself requires definition, for this is not simply a question of the equal melding of the patrilinear and the matrilinear, of the fusion of a duality. For aristocratic houses, lineage is viewed as that of the father, of the patrilineage. Adoption of the agnatic principle and of primogeniture concentrated familial descent and inheritance on the male line, with the first-born son inheriting the patrimony. The theoretical inviolability of this is reflected in Philippe de Beaumanoir's *Coutumes de Beauvaisis*: 'Chascuns gentius hons ou hons de posté qui n'est pas sers, puet par nostre coustume lessier en son testament ses meubles, ses conqués et le quint de son eritage la ou il li plect'.<sup>6</sup> Georges Hubrecht explains further in his commentary on the

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<sup>4</sup> This use of the term 'political unconscious' is taken from Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981), and is a key concept in Kay's *The 'Chansons de geste'*. She here defines it as follows: 'The incapacity of discourse to give a full account of the pressures and contradictions of historical experience creates what Fredric Jameson calls "the political unconscious": "literary structure, far from being completely realized on any one of its levels, tilts powerfully into the underside or *impensé* or *nondit*, in short, into the very political unconscious, of the text"' (Jameson, p. 49, quoted by Kay, p. 5).

<sup>5</sup> Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*, p. 93.

<sup>6</sup> Philippe de Beaumanoir, *Coutumes de Beauvaisis*, 3 vols (Paris: Picard, 1970-74), vol. 1, p. 174.



*Coutumes*: 'La réserve coutumière interdit au testateur de disposer librement de ses propres, dont les "quatre quintes", c'est-à-dire les quatre cinquièmes, sont réservés aux héritiers du sang'.<sup>7</sup> This inheritance of the '*propres*' is further contracted in the section of the text which treats 'Des oirs loiaus et des bastars': 'car combien il i ait de mariages et filles de chascun mariage, et du derrain mariage fust uns oirs masles, si en porteroit il l'ainsneece contre toutes ses sereurs nees des premiers mariages par nostre coustume'.<sup>8</sup> This concentration upon the male produces a muting of the female and the matrilinear within the framework of kin-relations and inheritance. Yet, as pointed out in studies by feminist historians, such formal exclusions of women from inheriting, wielding power, and otherwise taking an active role in society did not always reflect social reality.<sup>9</sup>

A comparison may be drawn between Bloch's theory of the changing perception of kinship relations during the period leading up to the twelfth century and Michael Heintze's study of the changing structure of kin-relations in the *chanson de geste*.<sup>10</sup> Heintze sees the shift from a horizontal to a vertical kinship structure as occurring later and developing more gradually in the literary works he describes:

Vergleicht man die Feudalsippen der Chansons de geste der älteren Periode mit denen der späteren Zeit, so fällt ein genereller Wandel in ihrer Struktur auf: während bei den Sippen in früherer Zeit die horizontale Linie vorherrscht, d.h. in allen Generationen eine Vielzahl lateraler Verwandter nebeneinandersteht, dominiert später die vertikale Linie, d.h. es existiert

<sup>7</sup> Beaumanoir, *Coutumes*, vol. 3, p. 60.

<sup>8</sup> Beaumanoir, *Coutumes*, vol. 1, p. 296. Although the *Coutumes* dates from the second half of the thirteenth century, the customary law which it collates is one which would have been current practice over a considerable period prior to this.

<sup>9</sup> See in particular Margaret Wade Labarge, *A Small Sound of the Trumpet: Women in Medieval Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986); JoAnn McNamara and Suzanne Wemple, 'Sanctity and Power: The Dual Pursuit of Medieval Women', in Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, (eds), *Becoming Visible: Women in European History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), pp. 90-118; and Mary Beth Rose, *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Literary and Historical Perspectives* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> Heintze, *König, Held und Sippe. Untersuchungen zur Chanson de geste des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts und ihrer Zyklenbildung* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1991), Part 3, Chapter 7: 'Veränderungen in der Sippenstruktur', pp. 495-524.

eine Hauptlinie in ihrer Generationenfolge, jedoch fehlen die lateralen Verwandten weitgehend.<sup>11</sup>

Heintze also points in particular to the importance of the uncle-nephew relation in the earlier *chansons de geste*, a relation which would appear to contradict Bloch's theory of the genre's insistence on a significant and exclusive patrilinearity.<sup>12</sup> Bloch says of the structuring of kinship:

The lineal family model is predicated upon the principles of partial resemblance, contiguity, and, above all, continuity. Thus the son reproduces the father, accedes to the paternal name, title, heraldic sign, and land. He represents an essential link in a genealogical chain, each part of which shares common traits with all others, and which, at least in theory if not in practice, remains unbroken from the first ancestor to the current heir.<sup>13</sup>

This model of reproduction does not, however, relate easily to that of the *chanson de geste*. Rather than continuity and an unbroken accession to the paternal and patrimonial, the epic reveals dislocation and fracture.<sup>14</sup> In addition, Bloch here ignores the space which the epic allows to women. Although traditionally regarded as a masculine genre, owing to its preoccupation with themes relating to feudal and social conflict, female characters do play an undeniable role in the *chanson de geste*, and in its genealogical structure. The notion of a lineage continued in a straight father-son progression excludes the formative input of the mother, the point where Bloch's linear

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<sup>11</sup> Heintze, *König, Held und Sippe*, p. 495.

<sup>12</sup> Heintze, *König, Held und Sippe*, pp. 516-24. The historical and anthropological importance of the uncle (specifically the mother's brother) in Indo-European kin-relations is signalled by Emile Benveniste. He relates this to the prevalence of the exogamic practice of marriage between cross-cousins: 'In this system, relationship is established between maternal uncle and nephew, while in agnatic filiation, it is established between father and son' (*Indo-European Language and Society*, trans. by Elizabeth Palmer (London: Faber & Faber, 1973), p. 183). The replacement of a cognatic kinship system in favour of an agnatic one during the eleventh century would then explain the lingering significance of the maternal uncle-nephew relationship in twelfth-century *chansons de geste*, as well as the ultimate displacement of this by the father-son relationship.

<sup>13</sup> Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*, p. 86. It should be noted that the transmission of the paternal name and the establishment of the heraldic emblem were not current before the fourteenth century.

<sup>14</sup> See Kay, *The 'Chansons de geste'*, Chapter 3 on 'Patriarchy', in which she points to the predominance of internal family conflict and the lack of smooth father-son succession in the epic.

scheme breaks down, for in the *chanson de geste* reproduction is open to a significant maternal influence.<sup>15</sup>

Since the (patri)lineal family model projected by Bloch clearly does not allow for a maternal presence, and still less for its influence, an alternative model should be sought.<sup>16</sup> The one I will use here is that of a reproductive matrix which illustrates more accurately the genealogical relations operating within and between medieval texts, in particular that of the *chanson de geste*.<sup>17</sup> This corresponds to a genealogical frame in which the characters of a narrative are plotted in terms of their disposition, value and contribution, producing a model which carries the encoded significance of their innate and individual meaning in reproductive terms, a significance that shapes and is worked out in the narrative. What this process produces is not so much a line as a subtly-braided filament. Each character acts as a point of reference which is marked as either positive or negative. The marking of the father and of the mother both then become significant in regard to the nature of their children, for both paternity and maternity have a reproductive value. The significance of these reproductive symbols can be read diachronically within the frame of the matrix, moving either forward or backward, a move which is important in the context of the *chanson de geste*, where the epic cycle is often extended in reverse chronology with the sons 'giving birth' to the fathers.<sup>18</sup> The reproductive structure of the medieval text (particularly that of the *chanson de geste*) will be considered in terms of this model, the positive or negative value of the father and the mother being related to the valuation and marking of the children which they produce.

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<sup>15</sup> This would correspond to the Aristotelian theory of conception, in which the mother has no formative influence on the child. While the mother produces the matter, it is the father who provides the form.

<sup>16</sup> See Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*, pp. 83-87.

<sup>17</sup> This use of the term 'matrix' is defined by *The Chambers Dictionary* as follows: 'a rectangular array of quantities or symbols; any rectangular arrangement of data in rows or columns'. In the present context it is used specifically to refer to the genealogical framework of the *chansons de geste* and to the reproductive role of characters (plotted as 'symbols' or 'data') within it.

<sup>18</sup> See Chapter 3.

The plotting of character as sign within this genealogical matrix reflects Claude Lévi-Strauss' definition of woman as sign:

Mais la femme ne pouvait jamais devenir signe et rien que cela, puisque, dans un monde d'hommes, elle est tout de même une personne, et que, dans la mesure où on la définit comme signe, on s'oblige à reconnaître en elle un producteur de signes. Dans le dialogue matrimonial des hommes, la femme n'est jamais, purement, ce dont on parle; car si les femmes, en général, représentent une certaine catégorie de signes, destinés à un certain type de communication, chaque femme conserve une valeur particulière, qui tient à son talent, avant et après le mariage, à tenir sa partie dans un duo. A l'inverse du mot, devenu intégralement signe, la femme est donc restée, en même temps que signe, valeur.<sup>19</sup>

Lacan comments, 'There is for her [woman] something insurmountable, something unacceptable, in the fact of being placed as an object in a symbolic order to which, at the same time, she is subjected just as much as the man'.<sup>20</sup> The split between object and subject, and between the positioning of male and female in a symbolic order, is important in the present context. In its inscription of character as symbol, the reproductive matrix draws together both Lévi-Strauss and Lacan -- both men and women are inscribed as symbols with an inherent value, but both also operate as character in the narrative. They thus operate synchronically within two different types of symbolic structure -- the matrix and the text -- the form and the function of character existing in symbiotic relation.<sup>21</sup> This contrast between form and content in the study

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<sup>19</sup> Lévi-Strauss, *Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté* (Paris: P.U.F., 1949), p. 616. The inherent contradiction in this perception of women as both sign and value has borne the brunt of much feminist criticism. See, for example, Gayle Rubin, who sees the continuation of this quotation, 'Ainsi s'explique que les relations entre les sexes aient préservé cette richesse affective, cette ferveur et ce mystère, qui ont sans doute imprégné, à l'origine, tout l'univers des communications humaines', as being: 'one of the greatest rip-offs of all time' presented as 'the root of romance' ('The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex', in Reiter, Rayna R. (ed.), *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York & London: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 157-210, here p. 201).

<sup>20</sup> Lacan, *Seminar*, ii. 304-5, cited in Kay, *The 'Chansons de geste'*, p. 152.

<sup>21</sup> This methodological study of character links with Jameson's study of genre and 'the rivalry between old-fashioned "interpretation", which still asks the text what it *means*, and the newer kinds of analysis which, according to Deleuze, ask how it *works*'. Jameson goes on to locate the source of such differentiation in 'the very nature of language, which, uniquely ambiguous, both subject and object all at once, or in Humboldt's terms, both *energeia* and *ergon*, intentional meaning and articulated system, necessarily projects two distinct and discontinuous dimensions (or "objects of study") which can never be completely unified' (*The Political Unconscious*, p. 108).

of literary character may be seen to equate with the binary opposition drawn by Fredric Jameson between the syntactic and semantic approaches to literary study. Although he applies these to the study of genre and of the literary text itself, the dialectical relation between fixed form and narrative content, may also be mapped on to the construction of literary character.<sup>22</sup>

The use of the term 'symbolic' in referring to the structure of society and text links with Lacan's theory of the Symbolic as the domain of language within which we are constituted as subjects in a social order: 'Language as a system imposes rules upon the human organism's chaotic identifications with objects and gives rise to the desire for the linkage of body, image and word; it gives rise, that is, to the social order'.<sup>23</sup> The Symbolic has been considered as a masculine structure, owing to the necessary rejection of the primary bond with the mother and the introduction of the *nom-du-père* as the signifier of difference.<sup>24</sup> Julia Kristeva works from this theory to produce the concept of the semiotic, a state of being which exists prior to the Symbolic, but which can only be articulated through it.

The maternally defined semiotic is the prop or support of, as well as the site for, the disruptive transgression of the paternal, patriarchally regulated Symbolic. [...] The semiotic must be renounced and transcended in order for the pre-oedipal child to acquire a stable or social or Symbolic position as a unified (masculine or feminine) subject. But this subsumption of the semiotic in the Symbolic is never complete or finalized.<sup>25</sup>

The reading of the 'woman as sign', and the notion of the masculine symbolic as the structuring order of society are both concepts which are important in the consideration of the place and significance of the female/ maternal character in the textual structure. The present study draws on the work of Lacan and Kristeva, together with that of

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<sup>22</sup> See Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, Chapter 2, 'Magical Narratives: On the Dialectical Use of Genre Criticism', pp. 103-50.

<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth Wright (ed.), *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 421.

<sup>24</sup> See Wright (ed.), *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, pp. 420-23.

<sup>25</sup> Wright (ed.), *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, pp. 195-96.



other theorists, where this provides a way into the study and interpretation of maternal character and function within the medieval text. The primary focus, however, lies on the text itself, on the reproductive significance which it assigns to the mother, and on the possibility which it opens up for her depiction as active protagonist.

The depiction of the mother in the medieval text can be related to the prevailing ideologies which served to construct a particular image of the feminine/ maternal. In both religious and medical discourse the woman was perceived in terms of body, flesh, and matter, while the man represented spirit and form.<sup>26</sup> In the introduction to their study *Framing Medieval Bodies*, Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin posit the notion that the culture of the European Middle Ages was one in which the opposition between body and spirit was more crucial than that between nature and culture.<sup>27</sup> This dialectical relation is directly allied to that of matter and form, crucial elements in the context of medieval theories of reproduction. The gendering of these terms is significant in the context of the literary construction of the maternal, hinging as this does on the question of the bounding of the mother in the image of the reproductive body. The concept of bodily frames suggested by Kay and Rubin provides a useful means of formulating and structuring an historicized approach to a notion of 'the body' as ideological construct. They point to the operation of the body as fiction, used for 'the construction of normative hierarchies and political systems' (p. 5), the framing of a notion of the body is thus seen to be dependent on a particular discourse

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<sup>26</sup> For the differentiation between body and flesh see Karma Lochrie, 'The Language of Transgression: Body, Flesh, and Word in Mystical Discourse', in *Speaking Two Languages: Traditional Disciplines and Contemporary Theory in Medieval Studies*, ed. by Allen J. Frantzen (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), pp. 115-40.

<sup>27</sup> See Kay and Rubin, (eds), *Framing Medieval Bodies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), Introduction, pp. 1-9 (p. 4). The nature/ culture opposition is one which has been widely used in anthropological studies in particular. It translates to the context of gender studies through the analogy with the feminine/ masculine dichotomy, see in particular Sherry B. Ortner, 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?', *Feminist Studies*, 1 (1973), 5-31.

or ideology, in itself product of a particular period and context.<sup>28</sup> If the formulation of a maternal image is thus seen to be dependant on ideological context, its construction within the literary text calls into consideration the role played by genre. The framing of the maternal character must therefore take into account the notion of the body and its ideological significance, but must also be related to its generic context.

### RELIGIOUS AND MEDICAL DISCOURSE

The themes of spiritual and physical motherhood are both important considerations in the literary depiction of maternal character. The construction of a feminine/ maternal ideal which draws on the image of the Virgin Mary appears in many texts, including the romance of *La Manekine*, and the *chansons de geste* *Berte as grans piés* and *Parise la Duchesse*, which feature in the present study. Thirteenth-century beliefs relating to the role and significance of the mother in conception and breastfeeding are also apparent, particularly in regard to the importance of blood and milk as transmitters of maternal character traits. The following overview of religious and medical writing on motherhood will provide a background for the textual analyses of subsequent chapters.

The evolution of a concept of 'spiritual motherhood' within the religious thought of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries is one which may initially appear somewhat paradoxical given the doctrinal emphasis in the same period on the superiority of celibacy and virginity over marriage and procreation. The development of the doctrine of sexual renunciation from the time of the early Christian Church to the early Middle Ages has been chronicled in considerable detail by Peter Brown in his study *The Body*

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<sup>28</sup> 'It is evident that the notion of framing invoked here is inherently historical, since the discourses and perceptions that frame bodies are themselves produced by, and produce, historically situated subjects' (Kay and Rubin (eds), *Medieval Bodies*, p. 4).

*and Society*.<sup>29</sup> Of the early Church Fathers, St. Jerome (d. 420 A.D.) stated: 'I praise marriage and wedlock, but I do so because they produce virgins for me, I gather roses from thorns, gold from the earth, and pearl from the shell', an attitude which signals the perceived superiority of the virgin state as well as the prime justification given for marriage: the production of children.<sup>30</sup> This justification, together with Paul's grudging recommendation of marriage as better than fornication, was echoed by St. Augustine (d. 430 A.D.).<sup>31</sup> Marriage itself was viewed as a fundamentally sinful state, existing in contradiction to God's original plan for humanity by its implied acceptance of the sexual act. Of course, the Church's 'de-secularization' of marriage, which Jeffrey Richards sees beginning in the ninth century in France, was not so much designed to exonerate the wedded state as it was to place it under ecclesiastical control.<sup>32</sup> Although the sacralisation of marriage through its elevation to the status of sacrament created an important space for church intervention in personal and political life, many influential authors remained deeply uncertain about the desirability of such a union. Physical 'purity' through sexual denial equated more readily with the ideal of spiritual purity than did the carnal relations implied by marriage, and the doctrine of sexual abstinence continued to be propounded into the High Middle Ages and beyond.<sup>33</sup> By the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the attitude towards marriage had mitigated somewhat, now perceived as according with God's will and the divine conception of the world through its perpetuation of humanity, yet nonetheless it was

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<sup>29</sup> Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (London: Faber & Faber, 1991).

<sup>30</sup> Letter of St. Jerome quoted in Vern L. Bullough and James Brundage (eds), *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1982), p. 8.

<sup>31</sup> 'Saint Augustine concluded that marriage guarded wanton marital indulgence from the graver sinfulness of fornication or adultery and that, even though nuptial embraces were not always intentionally destined for procreation, the sin that resulted from this was only venial, providing there was no attempt to frustrate the natural consequences of coitus' (Bullough and Brundage, *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church*, p. 12).

<sup>32</sup> See Jeffrey Richards, *Sex, Dissidence and Damnation: Minority Groups in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1990). He states: 'by the twelfth century the Church had effectively gained legal, moral and organizational control of marriage [...] In 1150 the theologian Peter Lombard definitively expressed the view that marriage was a sacrament' (pp. 24-25).

<sup>33</sup> The continuance of this doctrine is witnessed by the works of prominent medieval theologians. See, for example, *The Letters of St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, trans. by Bruno Scott James (London: Burns Oates, 1953).



still equated with a spiritual inferiority. It was in the context of this perceived inferiority of the married state that there appeared during the twelfth century distinct and elaborate themes of religious imagery which drew upon the marital and the maternal.

The extent to which medieval Christianity absorbed and refined a concept and imagery of the maternal has already been studied in considerable detail, notably by Caroline Walker Bynum.<sup>34</sup> On the same subject, Julia Kristeva states:

Le christianisme est sans doute la construction symbolique la plus raffinée dans laquelle la féminité, pour autant qu'elle y transparaît -- et elle y transparaît sans cesse -- se réserve dans le *Maternel*.<sup>35</sup>

This maternal focus of Christianity may be seen to owe a considerable debt to the twelfth-century elaboration of religious imagery. The moral attributes perceived as feminine, or, more specifically, maternal -- sacrifice, loving tenderness, nurture, were early appropriated by the medieval Church, transmuted and represented as Christian virtues.<sup>36</sup> Playing on the established image of the 'Mother Church', the abundant use of maternal imagery, especially that of the breast, milk, and nurturing, concentrated the idealisation of these 'feminine' qualities into an idealisation of the maternal.<sup>37</sup> Milk was often depicted symbolically as the 'milk of doctrine' or of Christian teaching, the analogy linking the word of God to an image of maternal nurture. The subsequent image of the Mother-Jesus, Mother-Abbot, or Mother-Church was most fully developed in writing by men, suggesting a male need to identify with a maternal ideal,

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<sup>34</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982).

<sup>35</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater', in *Histoires d'amour*, Collection Folio (Paris: Denoël, 1983), pp. 295-327 (p. 296). For an in-depth analysis of the maternal imagery employed by the Christian Church in the Middle Ages, particularly as applied to male authority-figures, see Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 110-168.

<sup>36</sup> For an elaboration of these stereotypically female qualities see Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 131.

<sup>37</sup> The popular theme of the church as virgin mother, common in the early patristic period probably because it expressed so perfectly the nature of an entity withdrawn from the world (virgin) yet expanding and converting (mother) continued to be influential throughout the early Middle Ages (Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 127).

or even authority figure. The convolutions of this play on gender have been considered in detail by Bynum, who points to the fact that although maternity would almost certainly have been perceived as a 'feminine' attribute, it is, however, debatable as to what extent the feminine may have equated with the female during this period: 'Throughout the Middle Ages, authors found it far easier than we seem to find it to apply characteristics stereotyped as male or female to the opposite sex.'<sup>38</sup> Rather than physical sex, it is the gender of the object of devotion which would appear to be of considerable psychological importance in the context of twelfth-century religious imagery.<sup>39</sup>

The role played by milk in maternal imagery of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was important and fruitful. As well as representing Christian doctrine and the sustaining word of God, milk was symbolically important owing to its linkage with blood. According to medical and scientific doctrine, breast milk was transformed blood, the natural flow of the menses being somehow mysteriously re-directed and transformed to provide food for the new-born child (see below). In religious discourse the interchangeable nature of blood and milk, and their connection with the notion of maternal sacrifice, are revealed in the linking of the image of the pelican, thought to kill its young, then revive them with its own blood, with Christ.<sup>40</sup> The pelican

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<sup>38</sup> Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 162.

<sup>39</sup> Works produced by and for medieval nuns reveal the popularity of the image of the nun as 'Bride of Christ', while Hildegard of Bingen dressed her nuns as brides in order to receive communion. 'The image of bride or lover was clearly a central metaphor for the woman mystic's union with Christ's humanity' (Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Woman Mystics in Eucharistic Devotion', in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), pp. 119-50 (p. 134) ). The focus of female devotion is here distinctly male, as opposed to the split sex/ gender of the 'Mother-Jesus' image. In addition, the image of the bride implies a (future) sexual relationship, whereas the mother/ child analogy is (apparently) non-sexual.

<sup>40</sup> 'The Pelican is excessively devoted to its children. But when these have been born and begin to grow up, they flap their parents in the face with their wings, and the parents, striking back, kill them. Three days afterward, the mother pierces her breast, opens her side, and lays herself across her young, pouring out her blood over the dead bodies. This brings them to life again' (*The Book of Beasts: Being a Translation from a Latin Bestiary of the Twelfth Century*, trans. by T.H. White (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1984), p. 132). Bynum points to the replacement of the image of nursing with milk by nursing with blood in the religious writings of the later Middle Ages, a development which suggests the innate interchangeability of these two substances (*Jesus as Mother*, pp. 151-53).

symbolised the sacrifice and redemption of Christ's Passion, as well as the physical nourishing with blood and body inherent in the celebration of the Eucharist.<sup>41</sup> The nurturing, maternal image of Christ may have been reinforced through this belief in the physical oneness of milk and blood, Christ being able to sustain believers by either means, yet this manifestation of 'maternity' was one confined to the sphere of an abstract and religious ideal. The widespread adoption of maternal imagery in twelfth century religious treatises does not necessarily testify to an increased appreciation of the role of the mother in society, but only to an idealisation of the mothering role, and of the qualities perceived as maternal. It is important to note the strong tradition of male religious misogyny and misogamy which ran parallel to this allegory of a purified femininity. The maternal image functioned by abstraction to produce a male construct which existed quite separately from the image of woman. The elaboration of maternal imagery in religious discourse is therefore not necessarily paradoxical, as this abstract concept of the maternal had little, if any, connection with the physical reality of women and of the human mother.

In addition to this flourishing of maternal imagery, the twelfth century also saw an increase in Mariolatry. The veneration of Mary as Mother of God, Queen of Heaven, and intercessor between man and God, developed to reach its height during the thirteenth century and continued into the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>42</sup> This widespread adoration extended beyond the ecclesiastical sphere, as indicated by the

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<sup>41</sup> For further details of the importance of the Eucharist in medieval thought and culture see Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Her study traces the development of the Eucharist 'from the eleventh, but mainly in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries' (p. 10), thus covering the period of this present study. The pelican as symbol of Christ is briefly considered, see pp. 310-12.

<sup>42</sup> Evidence of Mary's increasing influence in the religious imagination manifested itself in various ways, one of the foremost being the numerous churches which were dedicated to her during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In France, perhaps the most famous of these is Notre Dame de Paris, begun in 1163, but during the twelfth century work also began on the cathedrals of Notre Dame de Laon (c. 1150), Sens (c. 1153) and Chartres (c. 1194), among others, while in the thirteenth century building commenced at Reims (1212), Amiens (1220) and Beauvais (1227). For further details of the cathedrals dedicated to the Virgin Mary see Régine Pernoud, *La Vierge et les saints au Moyen Age* (Paris: Christian de Bartillat, 1991), pp. 14-15.

multitude of devotional texts, poetry and songs dedicated to the Virgin.<sup>43</sup> As in the case of maternal imagery, the feminine ideal presented by Mary may, however, be regarded as having little intrinsic connection with the image of women constructed by contemporary religious discourse. Women were equated with Eve, sin, and moral and social inferiority, but Eve was viewed as the prefiguration and anti-type of Mary, an opposition represented by the frequent linguistic inversion of the names 'Eva' and 'Ave'. It was the inherent duality of Mary -- mother, yet virgin -- which served to exalt her and to distance her irrevocably from the carnality of Eve.<sup>44</sup> Although a mother, Mary remained innately pure, uncorrupted by sexual relations and untouched by human sexuality. She both conceived and gave birth while remaining virgin, her freedom from pain, suffering, sin and death then removed her even further from the sphere of human experience, placing her emphatically on a higher plane of existence. The importance attached to Mary's physical virginity emphasises the value attached to female virginity in general within the religious sphere. Virginity was seen as the state of being created by God, physical wholeness seen as equating with an original perfection and integrity: 'An unbreakable "invisible frontier" lay between a virgin's body and the polluting "admixture" of the outside world'.<sup>45</sup> In order for Mary to be perceived as worthy of her exalted role this wholeness and purity had to be retained. The effect of her motherhood, in its unique and unprecedented form, was then to divorce her irrevocably from the image of the human mother.

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<sup>43</sup> Notably, in the early thirteenth century Gautier de Coinci produced *Les Miracles de Notre Dame* (4 vols, ed. by V. Fredrick Koenig, T.L.F. (Geneva: Droz, 1955) ), while in the second half of the century several of Rutebeuf's poems witness to his personal devotion to Mary. See 'Un Dit de Notre Dame', 'L'Ave Maria Rutebeuf', 'C'est de Notre Dame', and the attributed 'Les Neufs Joies de Notre Dame', all in Vol. 2 of Rutebeuf, *Oeuvres Complètes* (2 vols), ed. by Michel Zink, Classiques Garnier (Paris: Bordas, 1989).

<sup>44</sup> Following intense debate on the possibility of Mary's retention of her virginity after the birth of Christ she was given the title *Aeiparthenos* (ever-virgin) at the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451, and at the First Lateran Council, in 649, her perpetual virginity became a dogma of the Christian Church. For further details of the various ecclesiastical pronouncements on the virginity of Mary see Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Picador, 1990), pp. 64-66.

<sup>45</sup> Brown, p. 354. He is here referring to the attitude towards virginity prevalent at the time of Ambrose (4th century), yet this conception was still in force during the thirteenth century.

The thirteenth-century image of Mary as mother may be read as constructed in response to an influence and desire which were particularly masculine in origin. Her virginity and her sinless nature acted to empower her within the religious context, enhancing her sanctified status as Mother of God, yet by means of these same attributes her inherent female nature was denied. Despite her motherhood, Mary was alienated from female sexuality and from all of the natural maternal processes save that of lactation. Her image was so constructed that it was her 'feminine' qualities of humility, obedience and subservience which took precedence, and it was also abundantly clear that any supernatural attributes possessed by her had been granted by an essentially patriarchal God.<sup>46</sup> Kristeva suggests that the image of Mary was a skilful construct synthesising and, to an extent, resolving the religious, psychological, and social preoccupations of medieval society:

Savant équilibre de concessions et de contraintes à la paranoïa féminine, la représentation de la maternité vierge semble couronner les efforts d'une société pour concilier, d'une part, les survivances sociales de la matrilinearité et les besoins inconscients du narcissisme primaire, avec, d'autre part, les impératifs d'une nouvelle société basée sur l'échange et bientôt sur la production accélérée, qui exigent l'apport du surmoi et s'appuient sur l'instance paternelle symbolique.<sup>47</sup>

Yet the image of the Virgin Mary may be read as a reconciliation of fundamental, if conflicting, *male* needs and preoccupations. The 'survivals of matrilinearity', to which Kristeva refers, could be regarded as furthering the interests of women, but these are not sufficiently imperative to vie with the demands of the symbolic, or patriarchal, order. In her virgin-mother persona, Mary fulfilled the desires of male worshippers: an unquenchable source of maternal love, compassion and sacrifice, and an unblemished feminine purity. This image of a desexualised maternity allowed

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<sup>46</sup> Pernoud underlines the fact that sainthood is granted only through the power of God: 'La sainteté consiste avant tout à recevoir de Dieu une parcelle, un reflet, une micro-image de la sainteté divine, à correspondre, si humblement que ce soit, à ce qui fait que Dieu est Dieu; c'est Dieu qui rend saint' (*La Vierge et les saints*, p. 10). This would apply equally well in the case of the sanctification of the Virgin Mary.

<sup>47</sup> Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater', in *Histoires d'amour*, p. 323.



access to those aspects of the feminine perceived as desirable, while denying existence to those that were not. Any threat which Mary's supernatural nature may have presented to masculine power and order was negated by the distancing of the maternal image from that of women and from female sexuality. A study of the image of the Virgin Mary cannot therefore reveal the religious attitude towards, or image of, the mother in life. It may only serve to illustrate the desires and longings of a predominantly male section of the population, which were projected upon the ultimate mother-figure: the Mother of God. Rather than being formulated through an abstraction and idealisation of attributes perceived as inherently female, as far as these may be defined, the Marian ideal may be read as a focus and reflection for the male self-image, a projected fulfilment of perceived lack, and an objectified representation of male desire.

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The theories of the female body formulated in the context of thirteenth-century physiology cannot be divorced from theological influence, despite the considerable advances made in Western medical and scientific knowledge by this period. This was predominantly influenced by the translation of Arabic medical texts which first became accessible in the second half of the eleventh century at the School of Salerno.<sup>48</sup> The thirteenth century saw a further major development in Western thought, as the physiological and biological works of Aristotle, in particular his writings on animals, were first translated and transmitted to the Latin West. This influx of natural scientific texts was not only significant in influencing the area of medical and scientific theory, but also affected religious thought, especially that of Albertus Magnus, and, through

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<sup>48</sup> See Claude Thomasset, 'De la nature féminine', in Duby and Perrot (eds), *Histoire des Femmes*, II, pp. 55-81.

him, that of Thomas Aquinas.<sup>49</sup> It was the Aristotelian teaching on human conception which proved of particular importance in respect of the image of women, as Aristotle fundamentally contradicted Arabic medical theories which allocated a greater role to the female in the process of conception. With the adoption of Aristotelian theory, as well as that arising from the study of Arabic texts, the thirteenth century saw the concurrent existence of two basic theories of human conception. The first, based on Hippocratic teaching, was made known to medieval scholars principally through the works of Galen (second century A.D.), transmitted through Arabic commentaries. The Galenic theory held that both male and female possessed seed, or sperm, the synthesis of these two seeds producing the human embryo. The second theory, drawn from the writings of Aristotle, held that only the male was the possessor of seed, the female providing the matter on which the generative powers of this seed were to work. It is evident that the first of these theories allows the woman a greater potential input in the generation of the embryo. In contrast, the Aristotelian model emphasises the contribution of the man over that of the woman, for the essence and purpose of the generative seed was the provision of spirit and form, effectively the formation of the child and the input of life.<sup>50</sup> As seen above, this equating of woman with matter and man with form mirrors the gendered dichotomy of flesh and spirit formulated in religious discourse. In both contexts the woman is held to be inferior to the man.

According to contemporary medical and scientific theory the biological composition of the male rendered him hotter and drier than the female, and since heat was equated with perfection, the man was perceived as naturally superior to woman.<sup>51</sup> The interactive and mutually reinforcing nature of the physiological, moral and spiritual

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<sup>49</sup> Thomasset sees this natural philosophy as threatening 'les fondements mêmes du pouvoir de la religion' ('De la nature féminine', p. 58).

<sup>50</sup> Although the Galenic theory would appear to have predominated during the thirteenth century, the variations on this theme were complex, as scholars attempted to reconcile the positions of Aristotle and of Galen, of the philosophers and of the medical practitioners.

<sup>51</sup> For details of the medieval conception of bodily composition according to a conjunction of elements and humours see Thomasset, 'De la nature féminine', p. 61.

superiority of the male appears in the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas, who translates the biological superiority of man into specifically moral terms. In discussing the process of generation he states: 'Or, la femme a naturellement moins de vertu et moins de noblesse que l'homme, car comme dit saint Augustin, l'être actif est plus noble que l'être passif'.<sup>52</sup> The realms of natural science and theology interact, as the words of St. Augustine reinforce the Aristotelian theory of human conception. The advances made in Western natural science during the thirteenth century thus acted as 'proof' of the theoretical teaching of medieval, and earlier, theologians: women were essentially passive, bound within the sphere of the body and of physical matter, while the wider sphere of activity and the spirit belonged to men.

The deficiency apparent in the female contribution to the reproductive process was seen as further evidence of women's innate physical inferiority, a point on which Aristotle and Galen were undivided. The superior physiological constitution of the male, hotter and drier than the female, was not only thought to enable him to produce the formative seed for generation, but was also believed to have a considerable effect upon the formation of the physical body itself, and on its development as male or female. The mother was perceived, according to both Galenic and Aristotelian theories, as a vessel or oven in which the foetus was 'cooked' until it was fully developed and ready to be born. The womb was believed by the majority of scholars to be divided into two separate chambers, the right chamber carrying the male child, and the left the female. The sex of the child was therefore determined on the entry of the seed into one or the other of the chambers in the womb.<sup>53</sup> Predictably, the right chamber was generally held to be superior to the left on account of its greater heat which 'cooked' the male embryo to a higher stage of development.

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<sup>52</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1, 92, 1, 2. Quoted in Sylvie Laurent, *Naître au Moyen Age. De la conception à la naissance: la grossesse et l'accouchement (XIIe-XVe siècles)* (Paris: Le Léopard d'Or, 1989), p. 69.

<sup>53</sup> A child could also be conceived between the two chambers: in this case it was a hermaphrodite.



Male and female were thus perceived as different versions of the same physical model, mature/ immature, perfect/ imperfect, becoming gendered categories relating to the physical body. 'In a public world that was overwhelmingly male, the one-sex model displayed what was already massively evident in culture more generally: *man* is the measure of all things, and woman does not exist as an ontologically distinct category'.<sup>54</sup> It was only owing to the restricted development and lack of heat of the female that her sexual organs remained inside the body, testifying to her physical incompleteness.<sup>55</sup> In the context of thirteenth century scientific theory, it was the sameness of man and woman, rather than the alterity of woman, which carried the message of her innate inferiority -- woman was an imperfect version of man.

It was the physiological composition of the female body, the disposition of its humours, which provided the basis for the production of the matter from which the foetus was formed. This material consisted of menstrual blood, which, according to Trotula, the eleventh-century physician or midwife of Salerno, was produced by the excessive moisture of the female body, the greater dryness of the male complexion being the reason why men did not menstruate.<sup>56</sup> In contrast to the valorisation of the male seed in texts such as pseudo-Albertus Magnus' *De Secretis Mulierum*, and which is widely echoed in theological doctrine of the time, female menstruation was regarded as inherently unclean and even dangerous.<sup>57</sup> The author links the religious

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<sup>54</sup> Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 62.

<sup>55</sup> See Laqueur, *Making Sex*, for further details of woman as inverted man. With reference to Galen, he states: 'Galen, who in the second century A.D. developed the most powerful and resilient model of the structural, though not spatial, identity of the male and female reproductive organs, demonstrated at length that women were essentially men in whom a lack of vital heat -- of perfection -- had resulted in the retention, inside, of structures that in the male are visible without [...] In this world the vagina is imagined as an interior penis, the labia as foreskin, the uterus as scrotum, and the ovaries as testicles' (p. 4).

<sup>56</sup> For information on Trotula see Susan Mosher Stuard, 'Dame Trot', *Signs*, 1 (1975), 537-42; and Kate Campbell Hurd-Mead, *A History of Women in Medicine from the earliest times to the beginning of the nineteenth century* (New York: A.M.S. Press, 1977), pp. 127-34.

<sup>57</sup> Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Women's Secrets: A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus's 'De Secretis Mulierum' with Commentaries*, ed. by Helen Rodnite Lemay (Albany: State University of

prohibitions on sexual intercourse with the ideological conception of women as dangerous to men, the natural processes of the female body in particular presented as a contaminating and venomous force.<sup>58</sup> By incorporating a 'scientific' element into what was otherwise a misogynistic account of the threat posed to men by women, *De Secretis Mulierum* may be read as attempting to synthesise the theological and medical traditions and to substantiate and affirm both the danger and the inferiority of women. Anatomy could be regarded as 'a representational strategy that illuminated a more stable extracorporeal reality'; the female body functioned as sign of women's innate lack, but also of the threat which they posed to men.<sup>59</sup>

Given the danger inherent in menstrual blood, its function in the generative process created a particular problem. As a polluted and polluting substance, nutritious and venomous, the contribution made by the woman to the foetus, albeit a passive one, could not easily be accepted in either theological or physiological terms. In addition to providing the matter from which the foetus was shaped, the menses were also believed to sustain and feed it during gestation. Once the child was born, the same nutritive flow was diverted from womb to breast, where it was further cooked, changed in colour, and so transformed into milk. The whole process of foetal formation and sustenance, as well as the following nutrition of the infant, thus depended on menstrual blood. The paradoxical nature of female blood as simultaneously life-giving and poisonous proved difficult to resolve, as on this point medical theory conflicted with theological doctrine and with popular belief. Thomas Aquinas may be seen as representative of the prevailing mentality of thirteenth-century scholars. Accepting the

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New York Press, 1992). For details of religious prohibition on sexual intercourse during menstruation, see Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>58</sup> It was a popular medieval belief that contact with menstrual blood could cause leprosy, while the smallpox and measles, when contracted during childhood, were believed to be symptoms of the body's attempt to purge itself of menstrual blood absorbed during gestation. See Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, trans. by Matthew Adamson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 73-74.

<sup>59</sup> Laqueur, *Making Sex*, p. 35.

medical and natural scientific proposition that it was blood which provided the sustenance for both foetus and new-born child, he nonetheless rejected the possibility that this was essentially the same as menstrual blood.<sup>60</sup> Aquinas also rejected the theory that the menstrual flow was simply diverted to the breast and changed colour to become milk. In order to be worthy of feeding the human infant, the menses had to be in some way purified and its nature completely transformed, purged of its innate evil humours and connotations of pollution. Bartholomaeus Anglicus, in *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, appears to attribute purifying properties to the female breast itself, which transforms blood into milk through heat -- the breast, as well as the womb, becomes an 'oven'.<sup>61</sup> Only by means of a humour gendered as actively masculine can tainted female matter be purified. Just as lack of intrinsic heat caused the original production of the menstrual blood, so is heat required to purge it of its feminine impurities and to affect the metamorphosis into a more perfect substance -- one therefore closer in essence to the masculine nature and complexion. The purification of breast-milk is of particular importance since medical and natural scientific treatises alike stressed the preference for a mother to feed her child with her own milk which functioned as a form of post-partum genetic input, transmitting racial and familial traits.<sup>62</sup> Milk also carried implications of spiritual and moral purity. In view of this emphasis on the influential qualities of breast-milk, the widespread recourse to wet-nurses among the aristocracy during the thirteenth century appears

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<sup>60</sup> See Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine*, pp. 76-77.

<sup>61</sup> Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of 'Bartholomaeus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum'*, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 235. This English translation is used in the present context as it reflects the popularisation of the encyclopaedic work, being presented in a language and format which would have been readily accessible to lay readers of the period. The pseudo-Albertus Magnus also presents the idea of the breast as a kind of 'cooker' and steriliser: 'When the fetus is in the uterus of the mother her breasts are hardened, because the womb closes and the menstrual substance flows to the breast. Then this substance is cooked to a white heat, and it is called the flower of woman; because it is white like milk it is also called the milk of woman. After being cooked in this way, it is sent through the vein to the womb, and there the fetus is nourished with its proper and natural food' (*Women's Secrets*, p. 109).

<sup>62</sup> Danièle Alexandre-Bidon and Monique Closson point to the ideological connection made between breast-milk and racial purity: 'La pureté du lait est aussi celle de la race et sucer le lait d'une nourrice juive fait l'objet d'un interdit [...] en 1268, les Cortes de Jerez interdisent l'allaitement d'enfants chrétiens aux juives et aux maures' (*L'Enfant à l'Ombre des Cathédrales* (Lyons: Presses Universitaires de Lyons, 1985), p. 112).

rather odd.<sup>63</sup> Both forms of nursing appear in the literary texts of the period, although it is debatable whether depictions of maternal breast-feeding had any didactic function.<sup>64</sup>

While religious and natural scientific discourses both presented women as beings bound by their corporeality, physiological treatises presented the role of women in procreation as being of secondary importance, their contribution nothing more than a crude and sullyng matter.<sup>65</sup> The awareness of a potential maternal power and influence was closed down by denying the reproductive function of women, or by positing a 'masculine' process of purification for their bodily fluids. The influence exerted by the mother through blood, milk, or through imagination, is however, a prevalent topos in the popular beliefs of the thirteenth century, as well as in natural scientific works such as the *Secretis Mulierum*. It is this last point of the potential influence of maternal imagination which signals the fear of women's innate ability to subvert the strategies of male control. Thought could be translated to flesh; through female desire or imagination the course of nature could be subverted, producing monstrous children.<sup>66</sup> This destruction of the paternal image, the natural form of the

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<sup>63</sup> This was, however, a well-established practice long before the thirteenth century. Children were commonly nursed in this way in classical Greece and Rome, and the use of feeding bottles can be dated back to 2,000 B.C. See 'The Evolution of Childhood', in *The History of Childhood*, ed. by Lloyd De Mause (New York: The Psychohistory Press, 1974), pp. 1-73 (pp. 34-36).

<sup>64</sup> The depiction of the Virgin Mary giving suck to the infant Jesus has, however, been read as a form of ideological propaganda for breast-feeding. Alexandre-Bidon and Closson say, of the depiction of Mary in medieval miniatures, 'C'est Marie qui -- toujours -- allaite Jésus enfant [...] elle, la mère, est seule à assumer cette fonction dont elle ne laisse le soin à nulle autre femme. La scène est symbolique [...] Technique puériculturelle sous-jacente ou seulement pressentie de l'idée de survie de l'enfant basée sur un système de protection alimentaire? Il faut à ce dernier un lait qui lui convienne et nul ne lui convient mieux que celui de sa mère' (*L'Enfant à l'ombre des cathédrales*, p. 112).

<sup>65</sup> Lemay points to the similar intellectual training of natural scientists and theologians during the High Middle Ages: 'Science, medicine, and theology were intimately connected in the lives, careers, and studies of their practitioners. Many medical writers and natural philosophers were clerics (the Dominican friar and eventual bishop Albertus Magnus being a prominent example), and at the universities physicians and natural philosophers became versed in ethics, and theologians studied natural philosophy' (*Women's Secrets*, p. 50).

<sup>66</sup> 'Monstrous progeny resulted from the disorder of the maternal imagination. Instead of reproducing the father's image, as nature commands, the monstrous child bore witness to the violent desires that moved the mother at the time of conception or during pregnancy' (Marie-Hélène Huet, *Monstrous Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 1).

child, could occur at the moment of conception, or at any time during pregnancy. The perceived power of the mother to alter the appearance of the child and thus to deny its visible link with the father was one which could not be suppressed, lying as it did outside the controlling framework of the physical body. The human mother may not have been venerated or idealised, as was the Virgin Mary, but she was feared, the containing frame of the female body paradoxically presenting its own threat to men and to their offspring.

## CHAPTER 1

### DIDACTICISM AND DESIRE : STRATEGIES OF FEMALE SEXUAL CONTAINMENT

This fascinating mouth, like an artificial sign, like cultural labour, the game and the rules of the game, neither speaks nor eats, and no-one kisses it.

The strand of hair falling over the eye (and every other ocular erotic artifact) implements the denegation of the gaze as the unending dimension of castration and, at the same time, as an amorous offering.<sup>1</sup>

The search for a maternal ideal constructed predominantly within the secular sphere during the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries is one which presents particular difficulties, if not impossibilities. Specifically religious texts may certainly be identified and studied: those produced by clerics, in a religious environment, and with a specific religious purpose. A corresponding range of distinctly secular, non-literary, texts may not, however, be so readily defined. It is evident, though, that the demands, needs and desires of society, as regards its economic, political and kinship systems, did serve to produce a model of femininity to fulfil these demands. This model may often be regarded as converging, or even synthesising, with that constructed and promulgated by religious doctrine, yet the motivation underlying its formulation and aim can be read as fundamentally dissimilar from that of the religious ideal. It is the didactic treatises of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries which can provide a way in to an appreciation of this secular model of a feminine ideal. Produced for the direction of the lay community, the image of idealised female comportment which they project is one which appears bound within this community as

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. by Iain Hamilton Grant (London: Sage Publications, 1993), p. 103.



a reflection of its desires. Even here, however, the separate secular and religious influences may not be fully divorced from each other. The close interweaving and layering of religious and secular in medieval thought and culture and in its forms of expression clearly means that clerical influence can never be excluded.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, didactic literature addressing apparently 'secular' questions was often still essentially a clerical product, written by clerics themselves, as in the case of Andreas Capellanus and Etienne de Fougères, or by men with some form of clerical education.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of this, key differences can be identified between theological and secular constructions of feminine and maternal ideals. For the religious ideal, the basic theological division between body and soul, carnality and spirituality, and the placing of these in a hierarchical relation, undeniably served to emphasise the superiority of virginity. Sin or its avoidance allotted the individual soul its place in the spiritual hierarchy, and for women the most significant sin in this context was that of concupiscence: the 'sins of the flesh'.<sup>4</sup> While the dichotomous relation of spirit and body may have been conceived as gendered, man equating with innate and 'higher' spirituality and woman representing flesh and carnal desire, space was left for woman to transcend the body through denial. The religious aspiration projected through Church teaching was fundamentally one of chastity, or at least a gesture towards it, together with a rejection of the physical and the fleshly. As seen in the Introduction, the sacramental state of marriage was perceived as the sole context in which sexual intercourse became ideologically permissible, only condoned when its aim was the

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<sup>2</sup> On the interplay of secular and religious ideologies during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries see Aron Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception*, trans. by János M. Bak and Paul A. Hollingsworth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> See *Andreas Capellanus on Love*, ed. and trans. by P.G. Walsh (London: Duckworth, 1982); and Etienne de Fougères, *Le Livre des Manières*, ed. by R. Anthony Lodge, T.L.F. (Geneva: Droz, 1979).

<sup>4</sup> According to Jacques Dalarun, Jerome's classification of women in a spiritual hierarchy in relation to their marital status remained current until the fifteenth century: 'les vierges recueilleront au centuple le fruit de leurs mérites; les veuves, soixante fois; les épouses, trente' (Jacques Dalarun, 'Regards des clercs', in *Histoire des Femmes*, ed. by Duby and Perrot, II, pp. 31-54 (p. 43) ).

production of children.<sup>5</sup> Any acquiescence to carnal pleasure, even in the smallest thought, carried with it the taint of sin. For married women the attainment of a chaste and implicitly more spiritual life was obviously fraught with difficulty, as it depended on a rejection of the sexual relationship generally accepted as an integral part of marriage.<sup>6</sup> In accounts of married couples living in chastity together, for example Margery Kempe (c. 1373 - c. 1440) and her husband, 'perfection' was only achieved after years of 'normal' marital relations and many children.<sup>7</sup> More effusive praise is reserved for women such as Christina of Markyate (c. 1099 - c. 1160) who rejected marriage entirely in order to consecrate themselves to a religious life, retaining their virginity.<sup>8</sup> The probable reasoning here being that unmarried virgins were more obviously 'untainted' by physical sin and were thus seen as more intrinsically perfect and spiritually worthy.<sup>9</sup> By their unequivocal spurning of earthly marriage they also emphatically reiterated their spiritual allegiance and marriage to Christ, whilst the married woman inevitably appeared to accept the bonds of the flesh.<sup>10</sup> The main

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<sup>5</sup> Jeffrey Richards states: 'All sex outside marriage, both heterosexual and homosexual, was a sin and inside marriage sex was to be used only for procreation. Medieval theologians stressed that it was a mortal sin to embrace one's wife solely for pleasure. "A man who is too passionately in love with his wife is an adulterer", said St. Jerome in the fourth century, an opinion regularly reiterated throughout the Middle Ages' (*Sex, Dissidence and Damnation*, pp. 23-24).

<sup>6</sup> The 'debt' of the body in marriage was viewed as reciprocal during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, both wife and husband owning a right to the other's body in sexual intercourse. See Jean-Louis Flandrin, 'La vie sexuelle des gens mariés dans l'ancienne société: de la doctrine de l'Eglise à la réalité des comportements', *Communications*, 35 (1982), 102-115.

<sup>7</sup> The introduction to *The Book of Margery Kempe*, trans. by B.A. Windeatt (London: Penguin Books, 1985) provides a summary of Margery's life, including 'Margery's victory over her husband in her struggle to live a life of chastity' (p. 11). During the twelfth century there was considerable dispute over the actual necessity for the consummation of a marriage in order for it to be valid and legitimate. See Richards, *Sex, Dissidence and Damnation*, p. 27, for a summary of the differing opinions held by contemporary theologians. The questioning of the validity of virginal marriage held particular implications for the theological conception of the marriage of Mary and Joseph. For relevant details see Penny Schine Gold, 'The Marriage of Mary and Joseph', in Bullough and Brundage, *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church*, pp. 102-117.

<sup>8</sup> See Christopher Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 144-48, for an account of the life of Christina of Markyate.

<sup>9</sup> Dalarun states: 'Dans l'esprit des auteurs ecclésiastiques de ce temps, la possibilité de salut pour les femmes mariées -- et il s'agit là des plus grandes dames -- est d'abord une possibilité de rachat. La perte du sceau virginal est sans appel, tant au physique qu'au moral' ('Regards des clercs', p. 45). See also my note 4 for the perceived superiority of the virgin state.

<sup>10</sup> For information on the image of Christ as the bridegroom and spiritual 'marriages', particularly of nuns, see Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*. The concept of masculine marriage to Christ also appears at the end of the *De Amore*, Andreas Capellanus advising Walter (to whom the book is addressed), 'Therefore you must accept, Walter, the salutary instruction I set before you, and utterly renounce the empty



emphasis of thirteenth-century religious teaching in regard to women would seem to lie upon the Eve/ Mary, whore/ virgin opposition, with individual women taking their place on a sliding scale of value positions between these two poles. As a category, 'Man' was not read in the same way, drawing advantage from his perceived status as a superior and more spiritual being.<sup>11</sup> As such, he was not so nearly allied or bound to the flesh and its desires as was woman, and there was no ultimate requirement for him to transcend it -- the body was inscribed as the realm of the feminine, ideologically assigned to woman's own nature and state of being.

#### THE CONTAINMENT OF SEXUALITY

In order to exemplify the strategies of containment at work in thirteenth-century didactic literature, I will refer to three texts which illustrate these strategies in particular detail. These are the mid-thirteenth-century didactic poem *Le Chastoiement des Dames*, by Robert de Blois, *Les Quatre Ages de l'Homme* by Philippe de Novarre, written about 1260, and Raymond Llull's *Doctrina d'Enfant*, written between 1278 and 1283.<sup>12</sup> I will also refer to a late twelfth-century text by Etienne de Fougères, the *Livre des Manières* (c. 1174-78). All of these works present a codification of female duty and comportment which acts to constrain women's behaviour in both social and moral terms. The ultimate aim of this codification may, however, be read as the imposition of a specifically sexual constraint, linking with the exigencies of a

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things of this world. Then, when the Bridegroom comes to celebrate the greater marriage, and a shout is raised in the night, you may be ready to meet Him with your lamps adorned, and in His company make your way to the divine marriage' (*Andreas Capellanus*, ed. by Walsh, p. 323).

11 See Dalarun, 'Regards des clercs', p. 49. Man, created in the image of God, was viewed as inherently superior to woman, created as the image or reflection of man.

12 The editions of the texts referred to are as follows: *Robert de Blois: son oeuvre didactique et narrative*, ed. by John Howard Fox, Thèse pour le Doctorat d'Université présentée à la Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Paris, (Paris: 1948); *Les Quatre Ages de l'Homme: traité moral de Philippe de Novarre*, ed. by Marcel de Fréville, S.A.T.F. (Paris: Picard, 1888); Raymond Llull, *Doctrina d'enfant*, ed. by Armand Llinarès (Paris: Klincksieck, 1969). Llull's treatise was originally written in Catalan, the edition used here is its fourteenth-century French translation.

contemporary cultural mentality which essentially equated female purity with chastity.<sup>13</sup> The link with prevalent religious ideology is here apparent. As stated above, didactic literature was often produced by clerics, or by those with clerical training, despite its appreciably secular aim and intended audience. An exception to this is presented by the *De Amore* of Andreas Capellanus (late twelfth or early thirteenth-century), held to have been written for a clerical audience. Although its first two books treat the secular topic of the codification of the rules of love, in his third book, Andreas attacks the courtly casuistry of his earlier assertions, reiterating the teachings of the Christian Church in a strongly religious and moral tone. Chastity is elevated above the 'corruption of the flesh'; a woman who indulges in the latter becoming 'a foul harlot, an object of utter contempt'.<sup>14</sup> Likewise in accordance with accepted doctrine he states: 'by intercourse with wives we overcome lust without sinning, and remove our urge to sexual indulgence without staining our souls'.<sup>15</sup> There is no mention of the souls of the wives, but since Andreas regards them as equal partners in the sacramental bonds of marriage, they too, presumably, are absolved from the 'stain' of intercourse.<sup>16</sup> As he continues by speaking of the consolations of legitimate children produced in marriage, it would appear evident that the production of children, together with the stated suppression of unlawful lust, is viewed as the aim and justification of intercourse within marriage. At the opening of his chapter on marriage in the *Doctrina d'Enfant* Raymond Llull also states, 'Mariage, fiuz, est assemblament corporel et espirituel ordoné por avoir enfanç qui soient serviteurs de Dieu et qui reçoivent de Dieu grace et beneïçon'.<sup>17</sup> Llull takes this a stage further by declaring that marriage was ordained for man by the explicit intention of God, and

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<sup>13</sup> For information on the socially and ideologically important connection between the concepts of purity (in both physical and spiritual forms) and chastity see in particular Brown, *The Body and Society*.

<sup>14</sup> Walsh (ed.), *Andreas Capellanus*, p. 295.

<sup>15</sup> Walsh (ed.), *Andreas Capellanus*, p. 301.

<sup>16</sup> Andreas states: 'God has revealed that wife and husband are one flesh, and has commanded the husband to leave all others and to cleave to his wife' (Walsh (ed.), *Andreas Capellanus*, p. 301).

<sup>17</sup> Llull, *Doctrina d'Enfant*, p. 76.

now presents one of only two ways open for him to follow: 'tot autre estat se descorde de la fin et de l'entencion en laquele tu es creé'.<sup>18</sup> This would accord with the social requirement placed upon both men and women either to enter into a religious life or to marry and procreate.<sup>19</sup> Theological doctrine on sex in marriage also influences the encyclopaedic work of Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, which, to quote the Middle English translation, defines a good wife as one who 'vsi[th] [th]e goodnes of matrimoni more bicause of children [th]an of fleischliche likynge'; the 'goodness' of both wife and matrimony here focusing distinctly on the legitimate production of children, as opposed to the enjoyment of sexual relations.<sup>20</sup> Marriage as a sacrament ordained by God for the avoidance of lust and the procreation of children is therefore posited as a valid alternative choice to chastity and the spiritual life, even if judged as inherently inferior in religious terms. However, despite this reiteration of the precepts of Christian doctrine, the didactic treatises of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries may be held to have an intent distinctly other than that propounded by the formulaic structures of religious doctrine. The imperative to marry and to procreate is acknowledged, yet the weight rests on the avoidance of fleshly sin. Didactic literature which treats the subject of female comportment is fundamentally concerned with female sexuality itself, and most particularly with its containment. Religious and secular may initially and superficially be seen to collude in this restriction and confinement, yet there is a distinct divergence at the deeper levels of aim and intent.

The religious intent would appear to be a suppression of the physical in favour of the spiritual; a divergence of energy away from the earthly and carnal in order to achieve a heightened level of spirituality and purity. Works of secular didacticism promote the

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<sup>18</sup> Llull, *Doctrine d'Enfant*, p. 76.

<sup>19</sup> See Shulamith Shahar, *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages*, trans. by Chaya Galai (London: Routledge, 1991), Chapter 4: 'Married Women', pp. 65-125. She states that the number of women leading a purely religious life in the Middle Ages constituted a minority: 'Some widows did not remarry, but most women in medieval society, as in all societies known to us, were married' (p. 65).

<sup>20</sup> Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things*, I, p. 308.

ideal of virginity, for the period prior to marriage at any rate. Following marriage a woman may be enjoined to behave in a modest and chaste manner, yet the aim of placing a constraint on her sexual expression would seem to be other than that of ensuring her spiritual purity. Rather, this containment is one which would appear to relate specifically to the body; the circumscription of its sexual behaviour having a particularly physical, rather than metaphysical or spiritual, focus. Both before and after marriage, a woman is presented as a vessel or mould for social and genealogical reproduction. She implicitly embodies the means of producing legitimate heirs for a distinct male lineage and patrimony, and thus may not be jeopardised by being, or by being suspected of being, polluted by unlawful contact with any man other than her husband.<sup>21</sup> In *Le Livre des Manières*, Jeri Guthrie argues, the function of married women and mothers is both sexual and economic:

Si la maternité présente une fonction de la sexualité, et exonère par la procréation la culpabilité liée au corps féminin, c'est aussi une fonction économique de première importance pour le patrimoine. La femme dans le *Livre des Manières* sera, donc, le lieu d'un déplacement, d'un échange entre la sexualité et le réseau économique.<sup>22</sup>

This 'economic' function may be interpreted as relating rather to the economics of genealogy, or kinship, than to monetary economics, as the woman acts as a token of exchange within the kinship system. In this context, her sexual and economic functions do not find themselves in opposition, and are not exchanged the one against

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<sup>21</sup> For women valued as 'tokens of exchange' and as a means of forming political bonds within the male homosocial system see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia State University Press, 1985); and Susan Aronstein, 'Prize or Pawn? Homosocial Order, Marriage, and the Redefinition of Women in the *Gawain Continuation*', *Romanic Review*, 82 (1991), 115-26. See also Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women'. Rubin states: 'If women are exchanged, in whatever sense we take the term, marital debts are reckoned in female flesh. A woman must become the sexual partner of some man to whom she is owed as return on a previous marriage. If a girl is promised in infancy, her refusal to participate as an adult would disrupt the flow of debts and promises. It would be in the interests of the smooth and continuous operation of such a system if the woman in question did not have too many ideas of her own about whom she might want to sleep with. From the standpoint of the system, the preferred female sexuality would be one which responded to the desire of others, rather than one which actively desired and sought a response' (p.182). Although not here referring to the kinship system of thirteenth-century France, Rubin's reading of 'preferred female sexuality' may still be seen to hold true in the present context.

<sup>22</sup> Jeri S. Guthrie, 'La Femme dans *Le Livre des Manières*: surplus économique, surplus érotique', *Romanic Review*, 79 (1988), 251-61 (p. 252).

the other, but are synthesised in the female body, which is here given economic as well as sexual value by its significant reproductive capacity. Although Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's concept of homosociality, in which women function as tokens of exchange between men for the purpose of forging social bonds, is based on a study of nineteenth-century English literature, in relations between aristocratic and wealthy families of the thirteenth century, women occupy a similar position.<sup>23</sup> Their exchange in marriage forges kinship bonds as well as political and economic alliances between different family groups.<sup>24</sup> Another key aim of this exchange is also to provide legitimate heirs both to inherit undivided land and wealth and to continue unbroken the male lineage.<sup>25</sup> It is at precisely this point that the didactic concerns and desires of Church and aristocracy ultimately may be seen to divide. The social requirement for women not entering a religious life was marriage (as also enjoined by the Church), yet -- as an important part of the secular codification of marital duty and comportment -- women's sexuality was defined and constrained essentially for a public, external good, rather than for a private, internal one. The focus, perception and intent of this 'secular doctrine' is directed toward the social, rather toward the spiritual. The woman becomes an object to be contained and circumscribed to the benefit and desire of a familial, and ultimately masculine, subjectivity.

#### AIM AND AUDIENCE

It is in *Les Quatre Ages de l'Homme*, by Philippe de Novarre (c. 1260), that the concept of woman as an object to be enclosed and guarded, as a being having no

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<sup>23</sup> See note 21 above.

<sup>24</sup> For details of the marital structures of the Middle Ages see Georges Duby, *Le Chevalier, la femme et le prêtre: le mariage dans la France féodale* (Paris: Hachette, 1981).

<sup>25</sup> By the thirteenth century the agnatic principle of inheritance was firmly established. According to this, the major part of the patrimonial lands and wealth passed undivided to the eldest son of a marriage.

reliable volition or moral constraint of her own, perhaps appears perhaps most strongly. Returning to his earlier use of the image of body as castle, he advises with regard to women: 'Car se on les garde bien, qu'eles ne soient requises de folie ou trovées en fol lieu ou en aise de mesfere, legiere chose est a savoir que por bones pueent passer; car chastiaus qui n'est assailliz ne traïz ne affamez, ne sera ja pris par raison'.<sup>26</sup> The reason he gives for the necessity of this protection is one of female lack: 'Jones fames [...] sont en mout grand peril en lor jovant, car ele n'ont mie si estable sens ne si bon porposement comme ont li home'.<sup>27</sup> Raymond Llull also uses the argument of the intrinsic inferiority of woman to place her husband in authority over her, and in addition counsels his 'son': 'Ordenne ta fenme mout con tu porras si que ele te soit aidant a tenir ton ordre; car mauvese fenme et desordence fet home desvoier de l'ordre de mariage'.<sup>28</sup> Here Llull places the responsibility for a control and 'ordering' of woman directly on to her husband, to the latter's own benefit.

During the thirteenth century the general and intellectual inferiority of woman was a recurrent and well-established topos, both in religious teachings and in secular literature.<sup>29</sup> It acted both to affirm and to justify the subordination of women to male authority, just as it appears to function in this instance in Philippe de Novarre's *Quatre Ages de l'Homme* and in Llull's *Doctrine d'Enfant*.<sup>30</sup> Given that woman by definition was held to be subordinate to man, both in essence and in practical, social terms, it is perhaps not remarkable that the majority of didactic treatises of the twelfth and

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<sup>26</sup> Philippe de Novarre, *Les Quatre Ages*, p. 49. Earlier in his treatise, when referring to young men, Philippe states: 'Mout se devoient estudier et pener jone et autre, de bien garder le grant chastel, ce est le cors, en santé et en bon point a lor pooir; car de celui chastel, tant comme il dure, puet on gaignier honor et richesce et la senté de l'ame' (pp. 32-33). The spiritual imagery of the body-as-castle also appears significantly in *Le Chastel d'Amour*, by Robert Grosseteste.

<sup>27</sup> Philippe de Novarre, *Les Quatre Ages*, pp. 48-49.

<sup>28</sup> Llull, *Doctrine d'enfant*, p. 77.

<sup>29</sup> See in particular Book 3 of the *De Amore* by Andreas Capellanus, which lists the undesirable qualities of women. These also appear markedly in Jean de Meun's continuation of *Le Roman de la Rose* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1992): see the Introduction, pp. 27-29, and ll. 15219-46.

<sup>30</sup> Philippe de Novarre states: 'Après orrez le pour quoy, car Nostre Sires comenda que fame fust touz jours en comendement et en subjecion: en anfance doit ele obeïr a çaus qui la norrissent, et quant ele est mariée, outréamant doit obeïr a son mari, comme a son seignor' (*Les Quatre Ages*, p. 14).



thirteenth centuries would seem to be directed toward a male readership and instruction, rather than a female one. This is apparently even the case when the subject under discussion is one of female comportment. The *Doctrina d'Enfant* addresses the moral education of both males and females, yet is directed by its author to 'son amable fiuz'.<sup>31</sup> This 'son' is held by Armand Llinarès to be a simple fiction, yet if this is the case, the intended readership of the treatise is opened up, not to a general audience, but to an audience of 'sons': to an intrinsically male readership.<sup>32</sup> In the same way, the *De Amore* of Andreas Capellanus is implicitly directed to a male audience, ostensibly addressed to a (presumably fictitious) 'Walter', who functions as a composite of Andreas' readers, as well as of the lovers spoken of in the text.<sup>33</sup> Despite the fact that other didactic works of a similar period (twelfth and thirteenth centuries) are not apparently addressed specifically to men, their structure, content, and above all, tone, do imply a readership or audience envisaged as primarily male. The *Livre des Manières* of Etienne de Fougères treats six social categories; five being the masculine 'estates' of King, clergy, knights, peasants, and bourgeois. The sixth and final estate is that of 'women', who comprise a homogeneous category, undifferentiated as a group in regard to any function which is not specifically viewed in terms of the female body. The text's structure is neatly divided: the first half considers the three 'higher' social estates, the second the three 'lower'. In all this, the category of 'women' does play an integral part and may not therefore be viewed as any form of afterthought.<sup>34</sup> It is significant, however, that the female estate is placed last, third in the lower half of the social hierarchy, with the major and foremost part of

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<sup>31</sup> Llull, *Doctrina d'enfant*, p. 35.

<sup>32</sup> Llull, *Doctrina d'enfant*, p. 11, note 17.

<sup>33</sup> P.G. Walsh states in his introduction to the *De Amore*, "The pretext for the composition of the treatise is to offer information and advice to a young friend called Walter, who then plays Lucilius to Andreas's Seneca. But the form of the *De Amore*, in particular the sequence of stylised dialogues in Book 1, indicates that our author's motives in composing the work are not confined to the instruction of one individual. When the same man is instructed on how to play the commoner, the nobleman and the higher nobleman in pleading his suit, "Walter" emerges as a composite; the treatise gives advice to any potential lover who is not a serf" (*Andreas Capellanus*, p. 4).

<sup>34</sup> For details of the structuring of the *Livre des Manières*, see the introduction by R. Anthony Lodge, pp. 23-27.

the treatise being devoted to the implicitly superior masculine and public world. In his treatment of the category of women, Etienne does not seem to address a female public directly. He essentialises his representation into the two antithetical 'types' of 'bad' and 'good' women, with the image of the lesbian acting as mediating fulcrum. The implications of this essentialisation will be discussed in further detail later, but in the context of an implied readership or audience suffice it to say that the concentration on these opposing and reductive 'types' and the representation of women purely in bodily or sexual terms might suggest an objectification produced by a male author for a particularly male consumption.

A similar structure and tone may be found in Philippe de Novarre's treatise, *Les Quatre Ages de l'Homme*. Dividing man's life into the four basic categories of 'Anfance', 'Jovent', 'Moien aage', and 'Viellence', Philippe only discusses women as an integral part of each category after he has dealt with the masculine side of life, and in much less detail.<sup>35</sup> The division between the two areas of male and female counsel is also significantly marked by the evident subjectivity of, and authorial identification with, the first; the second being treated with a contrasting objectivity and distance. Philippe begins his section on 'moien aage' (in men) with the words: 'En moien aage doit en estre quenoissanz et amesurez et resonables et soutis... ', and continues to use the pronoun 'on' ('en') throughout, identifying both self and reader with the (masculine) subject of his discourse.<sup>36</sup> Contrast the much shorter, following section on women: 'Les fames de moien aage doivent estre abstinanz, et savoir garder lor enfanz... '.<sup>37</sup> In this case Philippe commences by using the third person and

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<sup>35</sup> Philippe de Novarre divides his treatise into four sections on the successive stages of life. These are subsequently divided into a series of numbered points, each dealing with a particular issue. The male/ female split of each section is as follows: 'Anfance': points 1-20 on males, 21-32 on females; 'Jovent': 33-85 on males, 86-94 on females; 'Moien aage': 95-160 on males, 161-165 on females; 'Viellence': 166-181 on males, 182-187 on females. It will be noted that the emphasis on an appropriate mode of female life is concentrated in the earlier years, when the regulation of female sexual conduct is of the most importance as regards chastity and child-bearing.

<sup>36</sup> Philippe de Novarre, *Les Quatre Ages*, p. 52.

<sup>37</sup> Philippe de Novarre, *Les Quatre Ages*, p. 88.

maintains this distance, as though relaying his female counsel through an intermediary; one implied as distinctly masculine.

### THE DIDACTIC PARADOX

The sole moral, didactic treatise of the period under consideration which does initially appear to be directly addressed to a female audience is the mid-thirteenth century *Chastoiement des Dames* by Robert de Blois, which opens:

Cest livre petit priseront  
Dames, s'amandees n'an sont.  
Tuit et totes communement  
Un beaul commun ensoignemant  
Orrez, et se vos le volez  
Retenir, toz jours en sarez  
A Deu et au siegle plus chier;  
Tant fait cil beaux sanz a prisier. (ll. 1-8)

The words of the poet are thus apparently directed immediately to the ears of women themselves, with no further male intermediary. By its content, however, the poem is ultimately defined as a masculine product. Produced by a male author, the poem/treatise is designed to project and impose the requirements of male society by codifying and controlling the behaviour of its female component. Yet in addition to this expected and envisaged aim the content and structure of the poem also acts to reflect and indulge male desire in regard to female sexuality. As pointed out by Roberta Krueger, Robert de Blois 'ultimately sets "woman" into discourse in a way that sexualizes her and makes her an object of male appropriation and pleasure. The female body becomes the figure around which the moralist "essentializes" the category of woman'.<sup>38</sup> As the poet himself objectifies and sexualises the woman of the text, so too does she become an object for the gaze of a male readership. The element of

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<sup>38</sup> Roberta L. Krueger, 'Constructing Sexual Identities in the High Middle Ages. the Didactic Poetry of Robert de Blois', *Paragraph*, 13 (1990), 105-131 (p. 110).

suppression and containment inherent in the stated aim and form of the poem -- 'Por ce voil je cortoisement / Ensoigner les dames comant / Eles se doivent contenir' (ll. 9-11) -- is subverted by its actual content and focus, as the poet dwells and lingers upon the very bodily parts whose sight he at first forbids:

De ce se fait dame blasmer  
 Qui seut sa blanche char mostrer  
 A ces de cui n'est pas privee.  
 Aucune laisse desfermee  
 Sa poitrine, por ce c'on voie  
 Confaitement sa char blancheie;  
 Une autre laisse tot de gré  
 Sa char aparoir au costé;  
 Une ses jambes trop descuevre. (ll. 189-96)<sup>39</sup>

Krueger views the poem's essential contradiction as reflecting 'the inherent paradox of the chaste aristocratic woman', who must 'repress, contain, cover the body and bodily functions, but must also be attractive, engaging, solicitous, socially graced'.<sup>40</sup> The paradoxical message being signalled to the female readers of the treatise is certainly one of its ever-present ambiguities, yet also ambiguous is the perception and effect of this message on the part of author and male audience. The illicit pleasuring in an enumeration of female attractions, 'Blanche gorge, blanc col, blanc vis / Blanche mains' (ll. 203-04), while simultaneously marking certain areas of the body as being 'off limits', is only one aspect of this sexualisation of women and their bodies. The ambiguity of the poem lies in the fact that it first sets up a code or frame into which ideal female behaviour may be set, then consistently destabilises this code by focusing on those elements of behaviour which inevitably lie outside its bounds. These elusive elements are perceived and represented as sexual, from the glimpse of unclothed flesh

<sup>39</sup> It is to be noted that here the object of the poet's discourse is 'dames', rather than 'femmes'. For a distinction between the two in contemporary lyric poetry, see Sarah Kay, *Subjectivity in Troubadour Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), Chapter 3, 'Gender and Status', pp. 84-131. She sees male-authored poetry as containing three genders: 'a "masculine" subject of desire; a "feminine" gender whose readiness to sate men's desire incurs their contempt; and a third, "mixed" gender which assimilates the *domna* to "masculine" norms, while continuing to represent her desirability as female' (p. 95). This distinction corresponds to that employed by Robert de Blois in the *Chastoiement des Dames*.

<sup>40</sup> Krueger, 'Constructing Sexual Identities', p. 123.

(ll. 192-97) to the roving eyes which indicate a fickle heart (ll. 411-14). Whilst such descriptions may be read as objectification or voyeurism, the consistent sexualisation of women and the representation of this process as illicit and subversive also indicates the implicit reverse to its enjoyment: an essential fear of its uncontainability. The fascination with a female sexuality that exists and acts outwith the frame which the text imposes on female behaviour inevitably destabilises and undermines a belief in the possibility of its ultimate confinement and control. This is forcefully indicated at the end of *Le Chastoïement des Dames*, when in place of further homilies on an ideal of modest and chaste comportment, Robert paradoxically asserts that such comportment on the part of a married woman will ensure the unwavering devotion of a lover:<sup>41</sup>

Et se vos baez a s'amor  
 Quant fait li avrez lon dongier,  
 Iert il toz liez de l'outroier.  
 S'il vos aime tant con il dist,  
 Ne laira por nul escondit  
 Qu'il ne reveigne a sa proiere. (ll. 747-52)<sup>42</sup>

Again, Robert de Blois may be seen to undermine and subvert the moral edifice which he himself has erected. Constant juxtaposition of ideal against undesirable conduct, and the repression of sexuality against its expression, are set against the work's closing with an accession to illicit love. Such a closure ultimately suggests that Robert's strictures founder for their own ends in the process of constraining an uncontainable female sexuality.

<sup>41</sup> It is evident from the 'Li Response contre l'Amant' suggested by Robert that the lady in question is married, and this forms her original argument for the refutation of her lover: 'Celui aim je que amer doi, / A cui j'ai promise ma foi, / M'amor, mon cors et mon service, / Par loiauté de Sainte Yglise' (*Chastoïement des Dames*, ll. 698-701).

<sup>42</sup> In 'Constructing Sexual Identities', Roberta Krueger states: 'The effect of "Et se baez s'amor" is to transform the entire poem from a proper manual on how to be chaste to a cynical guide on how to maintain respectability while playing hard to get' (p. 125). In the later version of her argument, she does, however, acknowledge the 'overstatement' of this interpretation. Her comment at this point appears more apt: 'I would like to suggest that Robert's advice to women, "good-natured" as it may be, has the effect of making women objects to be desired by men, and that the narrator reveals his own desire' (*Women Readers*, pp. 156-82 (note 42) ).

## FEMALE 'NATURE'

The fear of women's unregulated desire is manifested in the controlling constructs of other didactic works, where the perception of women as essentially more lustful and immoderate than men echoes the same conception of female nature represented in contemporary religious teachings.<sup>43</sup> When defining the nature of girls, Bartholomaeus Anglicus states, 'among alle [th]at is iloued in a wenche chastite and clenness is iloued most', yet later adds that a girl is 'hasty in likinge of Venus'.<sup>44</sup> The qualities perceived as 'natural' to females thus run contrary to those perceived as most socially and politically desirable. The control and suppression of sexuality may then be seen as a construct ultimately designed to effect a reversal of nature -- an imposition of social strategies of containment; strategies ultimately masculine in origin. This imposition of a social regulation running contrary to nature appears later in *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, when Bartholomaeus suggests that although it is natural for a man to love his wife dearly, 'for special loue he amendi[th] hire zif sche do[th] amys, and take[th] hede of here beringe and goynge, of spekinge and lokynge, and of here passinge and azencomynge and entringe'.<sup>45</sup> The later enumeration of the qualities of a 'goode wif' emphasises the essential nature of her personal containment, with sobriety, modesty and chastity marking all her public actions and interactions.<sup>46</sup> Bartholomaeus here seems to accept that a woman may have the ability for self-containment, yet her husband is still advised to watch over her every movement. The direction and control of wifely behaviour is translated into explicitly physical terms by the image of the

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<sup>43</sup> For the theological conception of feminine nature during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries see Dalarun, 'Regards des clercs', pp. 35-38.

<sup>44</sup> Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things*, pp. 301-02.

<sup>45</sup> Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things*, p. 308.

<sup>46</sup> Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things*, p. 309.



'yuel wif', who escapes her husband bodily, 'lepinge ouer londes and contrayes'; physically as well as morally uncontained and uninhibited.<sup>47</sup>

If women were accepted to have a basic and defining propensity for 'immoderate' and unchaste behaviour, then the strategies of control expressed in didactic texts may certainly be seen as an imposition of the social upon the natural. The ideal projected as appropriate for women was explicitly other than that presented to men, as evidenced by several thirteenth-century treatises. The content and focus of Robert de Blois' didactic poem the *Enseignement des Princes* contrasts significantly with his *Chastoiement des Dames*; the masculine and feminine ideals expressed in the *Doctrine d'Enfant* of Raymond Llull differ distinctly in emphasis; and *Les Quatre Ages de l'Homme* by Philippe de Novarre constructs a contrasting image of male and female life at all stages.<sup>48</sup> In Philippe's treatise, gender differentiation begins in childhood, particularly in regard to education and general socialisation. Although Philippe first of all emphasises the necessity of obedience for all children, reinforcing this with reference to the exemplary behaviour of the young Jesus Christ and Virgin Mary, his advice then divides according to the sex of the child in question.<sup>49</sup> The sons of rich men, he counsels, should be taught by the most able 'maistre' available. In regard to the content of this education, Philippe states:

Li maistre as filz de riche home se doivent mout traveillier d'apanre a eus cortoisie et biau parler, et honorer la gent, et cortoisement recoiller, et eux faire apanre les estoires et les livres des autors ou il a mout de biaux diz, et de bons consaus, et de granz senz, qui lor porroient avoir grant mestier, se il les retiennent.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things*, p. 309.

<sup>48</sup> See Roberta Krueger, *Women Readers*, pp. 156-82, for the differences and variations in emphasis between Robert de Blois' two poems.

<sup>49</sup> Philippe de Novarre counsels that children should take example from the Christ-child, 'et especiaument a sa glorieuse mere, qui fu toz jors dès anface plainne de la très plus grant humilité et obedience de douçor et de pitié qui onques fust en enfant, après Nostre Seignor Jhesu Crit' (*Les Quatre Ages*, p. 4).

<sup>50</sup> Philippe de Novarre, *Les Quatre Ages*, p. 13.

In contrast to this expansive education, the later description of that of girls predominantly stresses its negative aspects, confining and limiting the female to a context of non-speech and inaction:

Tuit cil et toutes celes qui les norrissent en anfance, les doivent destroitement apanre et ansaignier qu'eles soient bien en commandement et en subjection, et que eles ne soient baudes ne abandonées de paroles ne d'euvres vileines; et que eles ne soient vilotieres ne erranz ne demendierres ne covoteuses ne larges.<sup>51</sup>

Rather than recommending a social and intellectual education, as in the case of boys, Philippe aims his advice at the provision of a specifically moral instruction, in which female expression in regard to both mind and body is circumscribed and curtailed. A basic fear of the disruptive possibilities introduced by any concession to female freedom is consistently apparent in this section of the treatise. Women, it states, should be continually occupied, both mentally and physically, so they may have no time or opportunity to think for themselves. They should not, however, be taught to read or write: 'A fame ne doit on apanre letres ne escrire, se ce n'est especiaument por estre nonnain; car par lire et escrire de fame sont maint mal avenu'.<sup>52</sup> The basic fear in this instance is that literate women would be able to receive, and to send, secret love letters and would naturally submit to this temptation placed in their way by the devil.

#### SIGHT AND 'SEMBLANT'

The success of didactic literature in its appeal to the anxieties of its audience is indicated by the flourishing of the genre in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The prohibitions which fenced and structured the approved treatment and behaviour of women may have been perceived as necessary to protect women and society from the

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<sup>51</sup> Philippe de Novarre, *Les Quatre Ages*, p. 14.

<sup>52</sup> Philippe de Novarre, *Les Quatre Ages*, pp. 16-17.

sinful effects of the weakness and vulnerability of feminine nature. This continuing codification of female behaviour appears intrinsically bound up with masculine anxiety over, and fear of, the female body as a site permanently open to depredation and interference, permanently productive of an 'excess' that manifested itself in unbridled sexuality. The passivity inherent in this position was emphasised by the fact that most authors only considered threatening situations in which the woman could speak and be spoken to, see and be seen. Closeting and surveillance would normally suffice to keep unwelcome suitors or lovers at bay. Although it allows a whole new dimension to the consideration of 'excess', Philippe de Novarre's fear of the consequences of female literacy, namely that a woman might write and receive love letters, is not a common theme.

Sight and the eroticised gaze form a prevalent topos, Andreas Capellanus claiming that love itself arises from 'the thought formed by the mind as a result of the thing seen'.<sup>53</sup> In the thirteenth century Philippe de Novarre and Robert de Blois both emphasise the importance and influence of the eyes and viewing in the protection and containment of women. Philippe advises that a woman should be physically enclosed, that she may neither see nor be seen, speak nor be spoken to.<sup>54</sup> An entire section of Robert's didactic poem is devoted to 'Ensoignemanz de son Regart', and begins thus:

Sovant regarder ne davez  
Nul home, se vos ne l'amez  
Por droite amor;

(ll. 145-47)

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<sup>53</sup> *Andreas Capellanus*, p. 35. He continues: 'When a man sees a girl ripe for love and fashioned to his liking, he at once begins to desire her inwardly, and whenever subsequently he thinks about her, he burns with love for her more each time, until he reaches the stage of more detailed reflection' (p. 35).

<sup>54</sup> Philippe de Novarre, *Les Quatre Ages*: 'Fame ne doit estre vilotiere ne erranz; car, quant ele l'est, ele voit et est veüe, et plus aisiéement peut on parler a lei, et ele as genz' (p. 15).

Simply by looking upon a man, a woman may erroneously lead him to believe that she loves and desires him, for the roving gaze also signals the immodest and unrestrained woman:<sup>55</sup>

Ja de fomes, qui vain cuer ont,  
Li oil estauble ne seront,  
Ainz torment plus menuemant  
Qu'espavier qui l'aloie prant;  
Ausi se fait par regarder  
Mainte dame sovant blasmer. (ll. 163-68)<sup>56</sup>

The eyes and regard of the woman should be disciplined and contained for fear of the effect which her unbounded gaze may have, fundamentally acting as it does as the signal of her availability. In the *Chastoiement des Dames* as a whole, sight and the gaze function to eroticise the female body, as they do in perhaps a less immediately obvious way in other contemporary treatises. The male-directed and the wandering female gaze point up her unconstrained and sexual nature, while the male gaze lingers upon and eroticises the female face and body. In either case it is on the physicality of the woman herself that the focus rests. Her sight is implicitly sexual, allied as it is to her body and its potential availability and disposability. The gaze of the male lover, projected on to the female body, also acts to objectify her and render her sexually accessible, even if initially only in his own mind. The lover in the *Chastoiement des Dames* laments:

Vostre gent cors, vostre cler vis  
Qui tant me plaist a regarder

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<sup>55</sup> Robert de Blois, 'Chastoiement', ll. 151-59. The persistence of this attitude is revealed by its appearance in the fifteenth-century poem *La Belle Dame sans Mercy*, by Alain Chartier. The lady here refutes the lover's suggestion that she has implicitly promised him her love through her eyeing of him: 'Il a grant fain de vivre en deuil / Et fait de son cuer lasche garde, / Qui contre un tout seul regard d'ueil / Sa paix et sa joye ne garde. / Se moy ou aultre vous regarde, / Les yeulx sont faiz pour regarder' (*The Poetical Works of Alain Chartier*, ed. by J.C. Laidlaw (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), ll. 233-38).

<sup>56</sup> By his initial use of the term 'femmes' the poet here suggests that the immodest behaviour which accompanies a 'vain cuer' is an intrinsic part of 'womanly' nature. The hawking image also suggests the sexually predatory nature of the woman's gaze. Although she is inherently superior to the 'femme', the reputation of the 'dame' may become tainted by analogy with the former through their shared femininity.

Ont mon cuer en mauvais point mis,  
 Car il ne s'an puet saouler.  
 Mes eaulz en davroie blasmer,  
 Car par aux est mes cuers traïs;  
 Tot le cors l'estuet comparer. (ll. 656-62)

He may only ultimately be consoled if the lady will grant him the gift of herself, which it is implied she may well do at the close of the poem.<sup>57</sup>

The second popular topos in regard to the representation of female excess and 'surplus' is that of speech. A characteristic typically attributed to women in religious and secular literature, excessive speech or garrulity again signals the outward projection of female 'nature'.<sup>58</sup> As with the unfettered gaze, unconstrained speech defies the regulation and codification of female behaviour. Robert de Blois counsels moderation in speech and also in singing, while Philippe de Novarre advises: 'mout afiert a fame qu'ele parole po; car en trop parler dit on sovant folie'.<sup>59</sup> The latter would appear to regard the content of female speech as necessarily foolish or wicked; an over-indulgence in talk probably leading to an eventual loss of a woman's reputation, as through her own words she reveals herself as contradicting the required social, male-defined, ideal.<sup>60</sup> Women are perceived as threatened by speech, both their own, which acts to reveal their intrinsic inferiority or lack, and that of others, which may react against the implications of deviation from the ideal inherent in a woman's own words or deeds. Philippe de Novarre states: 'Et se li faiz n'i est, si le dit on; et par le dit est creü, et vaut près d'autant comme li faiz. Mout sont fames

<sup>57</sup> Robert de Blois, *Chastoiement*, ll. 642-46 and ll. 676-83. The poem may thus be seen to conclude with the topos common to many courtly love poems: the lover pining for love may only be saved by the lady's granting of his desires.

<sup>58</sup> For religious and popular stereotypes of women see Alcuin Blamires (ed.), *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

<sup>59</sup> See the sections of the *Chastoiement des Dames* on 'De Vantance', p. 138; 'Chastoiement de Tancier', pp. 140-41; 'De Chanter par Raison', pp. 146-47; and Philippe de Novarre, *Les Quatre Ages*, p. 18.

<sup>60</sup> 'Fame ne doit estre abandonée ne baude de mauveise parole ne de vilainne oeuvre; car se ele parole vilainnement, on li respont tel chose, soit voirs ou mançonge, dont ele sera par aventure correcie et avlenie toute sa vie' (Philippe de Novarre, *Les Quatre Ages*, p. 14).

avilenies, quant eles sont blasmées, et plus quant eles mesfont'.<sup>61</sup> Much importance would seem to lie in the concepts of implication, belief and 'semblant' in regard to female behaviour; so much so that the perception of this is closely linked to its actuality. Both reflect upon the woman's reputation and act to establish and define her position as either positive or negative in the social network. In his third book of the *De Amore*, 'The Condemnation of Love', Andreas Capellanus holds love itself to be a vice injurious to any reputation, that of both men and women, yet even he regards it as more detrimental to women: 'Indeed, extremes of love or self-indulgence are allowed to pass in males because of the recklessness of the sex, but in the case of women it is considered a reprehensible sin, causing the loss of an individual's reputation'.<sup>62</sup> The destructive influences of an actual deed and of its knowledge or belief are allied in this 'reputation', the social image and perception of a woman again being bound by the physical, as her essential 'goodness' or 'badness' is circumscribed by her body and its apparent circulation. The importance of a woman's 'semblant' is repeatedly emphasised by Philippe de Novarre, yet the explicitly moral content of his treatise and its sincere tone ground the apparent conformity and control of behaviour firmly in its reality; the visible or interpreted mirroring the actual. He also links the significance of an evident conformity emphatically with the establishing of a woman in her approved social context: uniquely and unquestionably one of marriage.

Noble chose est que fame soit bien norrie et de bele contenance; et chascune d'eles le devroit volantiers apanre et retenir, car mainte povre pucele a esté eslite et apelée a estre riche dame et hautement mariée par sa bone renommée; et mainte haute dame a esté refusée et avilliée par son mauvais renom de fole contenance, et en a honeur perdue et mariage.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Philippe de Novarre, *Les Quatre Ages*, p. 50.

<sup>62</sup> *Andreas Capellanus*, p. 295. In regard to men, Andreas states: 'There is no woman so exalted whose love a man might win without his reputation suffering a decline amongst good and wise men at every court, and most rightly so' (p. 295).

<sup>63</sup> Philippe de Novarre, *Les Quatre Ages*, p. 19. Philippe's use of the terms 'femme' and 'dame' does not here appear to coincide with that of Robert de Blois (see note 39 above), but seems to relate more specifically to social status, the woman being of low birth and the lady of high-standing. It is to be noted that it is the 'povre pucele' (my italics) who is selected for noble marriage because of her good reputation, her virginity equating with her apparent purity and goodness, and apparent purity with innate nobility of character.



In *Les Quatre Ages de l'Homme*, perception and reality are thus read as ideally one and the same, and the didactic implication is that a good reputation will of necessity follow from chastity and conformity. The essential and psychological gulf between seeming and being must, however, always ultimately act to destabilise the perceived surety and certainty of a 'reality' once this concept is seen to be mediated firstly through the protagonist's selective projection or suppression of its constituent elements, and then through an equally subjective appreciation and conceptualisation on the part of the observer. The basic instability of *renom*, the relation between perception and reality accounted so precious by Philippe de Novarre, is further reinforced by its application to female behaviour, since the potential purity and reliability of this is strongly thrown into doubt by other didactic treatises. In the *Livre des Manières*, for example, Etienne de Fougères describes the duplicitous conduct of the 'riche dame' who changes both face and manner according to whether she is dealing with husband or lover:

Vers son mari est morne et mue  
 et devant lui tost se remue;  
 vers son dru paint sa face et mue  
 plus que esprevier qui eist de mue (ll. 1013-16)

The visual deception continues and the gulf between appearance and underlying truth widens as women purposely confuse the two:

Par les mestres de la feüsselle  
 se fait de laide fame belle;  
 et de putain se fet pucelle  
 et de laide fronce belle. (ll. 1025-28)

Such chiastic organisations emphasise the instability and unreliability of female nature and conduct in which a woman's apparent moral and physical conformity may mask

the exact opposite.<sup>64</sup> The didactic concern to posit the necessity for a semblance of containment is therefore constantly undermined by the realisation that this 'seeming' is all there need be: a semblance in which any substance is simply the effect produced by another mask.

Again, it is the continuing reiteration of the topos of ideal versus deviance and of a didactic strategy for female moral containment which points up the actual necessity for such a strategy to be established and to be seen to function in the social context. The possibility and recognition of a divergent or deviant female behaviour calls into play a male fear of its consequences, and dictates the essential need for its containment. Twelfth and thirteenth-century didactic literature confines and limits its appreciation and portrayal of women to the realm of the body, whether through the idealisation of chastity or through a depiction of physical excess. Its basic concern in relation to female conduct may thus be read as one bound to the body and to its physical availability and deployment. As considered earlier, this essentialisation of the female into the physical and sexual carries a different value and intent whether in religious or secular ideology. Although secular didactic literature does emphasise the duty of women to repress their sexuality and all behaviour which may be construed as sexual, the benefit they themselves would generally appear to gain from this is a good reputation and possibly an advantageous marriage. However, praise for the woman regarded as self-contained, chaste and virtuous, together with condemnation for the excessive woman, promiscuous in sight, speech and body, does not constitute the final aim of this social didacticism. The focus of the didactic literature may initially lie upon women themselves and the essential need to control their natural excesses, yet it is upon the consequences of these excesses that the final import rests.

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<sup>64</sup> This topos of female duplicity and deception also appears in other literary forms, particularly that of the fabliaux. See, for instance, 'De la robe vermeille' and 'Le dit des perdrix', in which the quick-witted woman dupes her husband and thus saves herself from blame: *Choix de Fabliaux*, ed. by Guy Raynaud de Lage (Paris: Champion, 1986).

## THE SOCIAL BODY

The content of thirteenth-century moralistic treatises may be seen to be directed towards the regulation of female behaviour specifically in the context of secular society, for an existing or future state of marriage generally appears to be accepted as given. For these texts, female sexual behaviour has no intrinsic value. Rather, it is given positive or negative significance with respect to its deployment in the field of social, or more particularly, marital, relations. It is the perceived consequences of an undisciplined sexuality functioning in the context of marriage which appear as the ultimate focus of didactic strictures. The frame of moral and social values which aims to constrain and contain female expression is formulated and projected to this end; to maintain chastity before marriage and fidelity within marriage, thus ensuring the legitimacy of all subsequent children. Adulterous women are certainly seen to be condemned in didactic texts produced during the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but promiscuous sexual conduct in isolation, without regard to its possible consequences, is portrayed as a feminine vice along with garrulity, gluttony or vanity, rather than as a distinct and punishable crime. It is the acknowledged physical outcome of such conduct -- the production of illegitimate children -- which carries the greatest censure. The significance of a woman's moral misconduct is here seen to be displaced. No longer concentrated upon her own body and her own individual moral and spiritual valuation, the consequences of a woman's physical circulation are transferred to the social body. Adultery which produces illegitimate heirs is no longer viewed as a personal sin, but as a sin against the (male) social order. The destabilising effects of adultery with social inferiors in particular is stressed by Etienne de Fougères in *Le Livre des Manières*:

Mes tal lineie est isi nee  
dun la nobleice est afinee.

Dou gentil baron son saignor  
a l'avoitron eschiet l'ennor;  
por ce sunt or li er menor  
que de la geste anciennor. (ll. 1083-88)

The corruption of the noble lineage with inferior blood and qualities is here the prime consideration. The continuing importance of this concern is reflected in the following century by Philippe de Novarre: 'car por les hoirs, qui ont les sornons dou pere, dure en cest siecle plus longuement la memoire de lui et de ces ancestres'.<sup>65</sup> In this case the legitimate heirs are explicitly linked with the father and with the perpetuation of the male lineage. It is Raymond Llull, in the *Doctrine d'Enfant*, who refers to the allied anxiety of wrongful inheritance, as the illegitimate child not only corrupts the paternal blood-line, but dispossesses the rightful heir to the patrimony: 'Amable fiux, luxure fet les genz guerrier et les fenmes et les viles et les chastiaux destruire et ardoir, et fet les avouros et les bastarz a grant tort participer en l'eritage de ceus qui sont engendré en mariage par l'acort de sainte eglise'.<sup>66</sup> Note that the passage does not say that 'bastarz' have no rightful place in the social order, but rather that it is 'luxure' that makes them desire something other than their due. In short, it is not illegitimate children, but the mothers who conceive and then lie about them, who are the problem. It is this specifically masculine fear of the disruption of the 'natural' social hierarchy and the transmission of name, blood, wealth and lands through a direct male lineage, which can be read as fundamentally dictating the physical and moral containment of women in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The increase in production of didactic texts during the thirteenth century mirrors the consolidation of the agnatic principle of inheritance during the same period. Henry de Bracton, who compiled his legal treatise, *De Legibus* (*On the Laws and Customs of*

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<sup>65</sup> Philippe de Novarre, *Les Quatre Ages*, p. 46.

<sup>66</sup> Raymond Llull, *Doctrine d'Enfant*, p. 64.

England) by 1256, states that if a man has both sons and daughters, the sons will be 'nearer heirs', and the daughters 'remote heirs'.<sup>67</sup> The eldest son will inherit and the inheritance will then pass to his own son, rather than to the brothers of the former. Obviously, in such a situation, the question of the heir's legitimacy becomes an consideration of paramount importance.<sup>68</sup> This sole male heir would carry the weight of name and lineage, together with the social, economic, and political duty to extend this lineage into the next generation. This social concern is transposed to the context of didactic literature, where it appears essentialised in the male disquiet over the female body and its operations. Raymond Llull's work is evidence of the positive psychological importance of genealogical continuity during the thirteenth century, bound up as it was with the belief that moral and spiritual qualities could be inherited from both father and mother, just as were physical characteristics.<sup>69</sup> This belief served to place a woman in a double bind of moral 'worthiness': her marital fidelity acted simultaneously to ensure that her children were legitimate heirs to her husband's lineage and patrimony, and also that they would inherit her own perceived moral qualities.

The codification of common law, by Bracton in England in the first half of the thirteenth century, and in France by Philippe de Beaumanoir, who compiled the *Coutumes de Beauvaisis* in the second half of the century, produced little in the way of

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<sup>67</sup> *Bracton on the Laws and Customs of England*, ed. by George E. Woodbine, 4 vols (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1968-77), II, pp. 188-89. Philippe de Beaumanoir, in his *Coutumes de Beauvaisis*, also witnesses to the contemporary custom of the sexual precedence of males in regard to inheritance: 'car combien il i ait de mariages et filles de chascun mariage, et du derrain mariage fust uns oirs masles, si en porteroit il l'aisneece contre toutes ses sereurs nees des premiers mariages par nostre coustume' (I, p. 296).

<sup>68</sup> On the subject of the perceived importance of patrilinearity and inheritance see Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*. See also my Chapter 3 for the relation of this to the literary framework.

<sup>69</sup> The importance of the male lineage is also reflected by the later *chansons de geste*, which retrospectively created a worthy ancestry for an epic hero. For example, the heroically superior lineage of Godefroi de Bouillon was consolidated by his linkage with the legend of the supernatural Swan Knight. See *The Old French Crusade Cycle*, vol 1, *La Naissance du Chevalier au Cygne*, ed. by Jan A. Nelson and Emanuel J. Mickel Jr. (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1977); vol. 2, *Le Chevalier au Cygne* and *La Fin d'Elias*, ed. by Jan A. Nelson (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1985).

authoritative legal pronouncement to dispel contemporary social, or more distinctly, masculine, anxieties over the question of legitimacy.<sup>70</sup> The problem of establishing the true paternity of a child produced within the bonds of marriage is recognised by both jurists, and both make essentially the same ruling. Bracton states unreservedly:

If husband and wife live together and there is no impediment on either side to prevent conception and the wife conceives by someone other than her husband, the issue will be legitimate, because of the presumption, because it is born of the wife, whether the husband avows or disavows it, for this presumption admits of no proof to the contrary.<sup>71</sup>

The word of the husband is therefore disallowed and valueless, the physical production of a child by his legitimate wife carrying more intrinsic significance and 'proof' than the purely vocal refutations of the husband. Beaumanoir treats the same situation, yet presents it more radically, commencing his article: 'Toute soit il ainsi que commune renomee queure contre une fame qui est en mariage qu'ele est bien de plusieurs hommes charnelment...'.<sup>72</sup> In this case the wife is publicly and by reputation renowned to be unfaithful to her husband, yet still any child produced by her will be counted as legitimate: '...li enfant en ce cas ne sont pas tenu pour bastart, car puet estre qu'il sont du mari et puet estre que non sont'.<sup>73</sup> The problem here is one of proof. It is only when a wife is physically separated from her husband over a period of time, or the husband is obviously unfit to father a child, and yet a child is born, that it may be seen to be illegitimate and may be formally declared as such by the husband: '...car male chose seroit que cil qui seroient bastart et avoutre a sa veue et a

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<sup>70</sup> For details of the legal system in France during the medieval period see Jean-François Lemarignier, *La France médiévale: institutions et sociétés* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1970). Customary law depended on oral transmission, particularly in Northern France, which was not so heavily influenced by Roman, written, law as was the South. According to Lemarignier, from the twelfth to the fifteenth century the notion of upholding the law by reference to custom was highly important: 'Et l'on a fini par distinguer deux choses: ou bien la coutume est notoire et la notoriété suffit à la prouver; ou bien elle ne l'est pas et l'on procède à une enquête par turbe (*turba*, foule): il faut au moins dix témoins' (p. 242). As this method of enquiry made customary law cumbersome and possibly difficult to administer, works known as 'coutumiers' in which the law was codified began to be compiled. These were mainly produced during the thirteenth century and significant examples include the *Vieilles Coutumes de Normandie* (early thirteenth-century), and the *Coutumes de Beauvaisis*.

<sup>71</sup> Bracton, *De Legibus*, vol 2, p. 204.

<sup>72</sup> Beaumanoir, *Coutumes*, vol 1, p. 282, point 581.

<sup>73</sup> Beaumanoir, *Coutumes*, vol 1, p. 282, point 581.



sa seue fussent si oir et en partassent son eritage maugré sien'.<sup>74</sup> Given the basic impossibility of pronouncing illegitimate a child born within a legal marriage, it is perhaps predictable that the focus of control should shift to the prospective mother. The thirteenth-century concern to formulate and impose a frame of moral values and a set of codified constraints to regulate female behaviour may then be regarded as a logical and necessary phenomenon. For it was only through a physical and psychological curtailment and containment of female sexual freedom that the requirements of the patriarchal society in regard to its legitimate reproduction and continuation may be met.

If it is accepted that the fundamental aim of the didactic treatises here in question was to control and direct female sexuality to approved ends (the production of legitimate children) within the context of marriage, a specific section of Etienne de Fougères' *Livre des Manières* becomes particularly problematic. Following his condemnation of the 'riche dame', whose promiscuous behaviour defies all dictates, and before a consideration of the virtuous 'bone fame', Etienne inserts a short, yet vitriolic, denunciation of those women whose conduct and desire run 'contrary to nature' (l. 1105):

Ne joent pas a piquenpance,  
a pleins escuz joignent sanz lance.  
N'ont soign de lange en lor balance,  
ne en lor mole point de mance (ll. 1109-12)

His description of lesbian behaviour refers to this as 'un jeu', and may be regarded as an entertaining play upon words, sexual innuendo and double-entendre, yet the penalties which the poet calls for are severe:

Celui deit l'en a chiens hüer,  
pierres et bastons estrüer;

<sup>74</sup> Beaumanoir, *Coutumes*, vol 1, p. 289, point 590.



torchons li devreit [l'en] rüer  
et con autres gueignons tüer. (ll. 1101-04)

Given that the lesbian relationship has the significant social advantage that no illegitimate children may be produced thereby, this strict censure may seem somewhat harsh and exaggerated. This is particularly so since the previous category of 'bad women' includes those who take up sorcery or abortion, causing death through their charms and potions, as well as women who produce bastard children within marriage.<sup>75</sup> In regard to these sins however, Etienne states: 'De tel pechié n'est pas merveille, / des que Nature le conseille,' (ll. 1097-98). He thus inscribes the sexual and moral misconduct of the 'riche dame' and the sorceress firmly into the category of 'natural' feminine behaviour. One to be morally censured from a masculine point of view, and yet also to be expected from naturally unstable and unrestrained females. Both the adulterous woman and the lesbian employ their sexuality outside the approved and controlling frame of marriage, yet it is in the displacement of a specifically masculine focus for this sexuality in favour of a feminine one that the fundamental difficulty would seem to lie. By rejecting all men, and yet not restricting herself to a chaste religious life, the homosexual woman falls explicitly outside the normative social categories of femininity. Her sexual 'value' is, in male homosocial terms, rendered null and void, as it is no longer available for masculine appropriation and use. Fear and anxiety over the unrestricted employment of female sexuality which appears throughout twelfth and thirteenth-century didactic literature is here compounded by the additional anxiety produced by a sexual discourse which rejects its masculine component altogether. In that regard, both lesbianism and illegitimacy disturb the grammar of lineage. Rather than acting to subvert the formulaic ordering of the patrilinear social structure, as the adulterous wife may be seen to do, the lesbian attacks and parodies its privileging of activity.<sup>76</sup> By fighting 'with shields but no

<sup>75</sup> Etienne de Fougères, *Le Livre des Manières*, ll. 1033-52; ll. 1081-96.

<sup>76</sup> On lesbianism as a sin against the grammar of sexual propriety, see Alan of Lille, *The Complaint of Nature*, trans. by James J. Sheridan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1980), pp.

lances', lesbians subvert and destabilise the formulae that make up the *chanson de geste* of a patrilinear social structure.<sup>77</sup> Despite the sterility of the lesbian relationship and the lack of any threat posed to inheritance, it is the recognition of this fundamental assault, inherent in female homosexuality, which produces the ambiguous and violent response of *Le Livre des Manières*.<sup>78</sup> In place of an assault on the male homosocial order comes an assault on the identification of the masculine with the 'active principle' as the lesbians play out something that is neither truly activity nor passivity.

### THE MATERNAL ROLE

In *Les Quatre Ages de l'Homme*, the ideal of femininity is painted through a detailing of the negative traits which it does not show, a procedure which produces an ideal defined by its absence.<sup>79</sup> Instead of any positive description of an ideal, we are given a series of strictures and restrictions designed to confine and contain: '...fame ne doit estre abandonée...'; 'Fame se doit mout garder...'; 'Fame ne doit estre vilotièr ne erranz...'; 'Fame ne doit estre large...'. The ideal woman or wife cannot be inscribed as a textual subject for she remains inactive and inexpressive, her subjectivity as restrained and suppressed as her sexuality.<sup>80</sup> Conformity equates to invisibility, while the deviant woman is inscribed as subject through the description of

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158-59: 'In addition, I gave instruction that the conjugations of Dione's daughter [...] should not tolerate a situation where the active type, by appropriating an additional meaning, goes over to the passive or the passive, laying aside its proper character, return to the active or where a verb with a passive ending retains an active meaning and adopts the rule of deponents' (p. 159). As Sheridan points out, 'the deponent verb is passive (a woman) in form, but active (a man) in meaning' (p. 159, note 15).

<sup>77</sup> The idea that lesbianism is both something and nothing is also reflected in penitentials. As Brundage points out, sex between women is presented as 'more shocking' than sodomy, but, at the same time, not a serious threat (James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 400 and note 397).

<sup>78</sup> Compare this response to the homophobic outbursts of the *Roman d'Enéas* discussed by Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, pp. 77-85.

<sup>79</sup> Philippe de Novarre, *Les Quatre Ages*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>80</sup> This ideological construction of the female presence in the text -- present, yet absent -- parallels the notion of female character in contemporary literary texts as being the projection and embodiment of male desire.

her actions as decisive and expressive (even though these may serve to inscribe her as a 'type', rather than as an individual). If the image of the 'good wife' is predicated on absence, then what of the 'good mother' in didactic literature? Does her role also consist in not making a mark, and if so, how does the question of maternal influence appear in this potentially problematic paradigm?

Productive sexuality, whether confined within the context of a monogamous marriage, or functioning outside its bounds, acts to place either a positive or a negative value on a woman in her role as mother. To an extent, the subsequent conduct as a mother of a woman who has born illegitimate children may be viewed as irrelevant, for she has already been endowed with a negative valuation in the social and reproductive structure. Indeed, the woman who allows her sexual desire a free rein and in consequence either produces or aborts an illegitimate child is consistently censured. According to Philippe de Novarre: 'Tieus est la meniere et li usages des fames qui font folie et vilenies de lor cors [...] les fames honissent et avilenissent eles meïsmes et tout lor lignage ensemble'.<sup>81</sup> Such condemnation stresses the shame brought by sexual indulgence not only on the errant woman but also on the lineage and its continuation.

What then of the ideal mother? In twelfth and thirteenth-century didactic literature there are certainly many references to legitimate children and, by analogy, references to their parents. As considered above, the majority of didactic works may be viewed as addressing their content to a male, rather than to a female, audience and this masculine bias and direction may subsequently be seen to affect the depiction of women as mothers in the didactic context. Writing at the end of the twelfth century, Etienne de Fougères makes the following reference to the joys of parenthood:

Et la dome conceit et porte

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<sup>81</sup> Philippe de Novarre, *Les Quatre Ages*, p. 50.

et a effant, s'ele n'avorte,  
ou se deduit et se deporte  
et toz ses delis treconforte.

Et li mariz, si con li quit,  
ra des effanz trop bon deduit,  
qui en atent avoir bon fruit  
quant il sunt nori et estruit. (ll. 1181-88)

The delight of the mother is concentrated on the infant, whilst the father gains greater pleasure from the child once it is more fully developed. The 'good fruit' of the marriage is perhaps seen to redound more to the father's credit, as it is he who will gain the benefit of this once the child is grown and educated. This short extract may be held to suggest that the mother was more particularly conceived as having a role in the nurturing of a young child, while the father held more responsibility and interest in its education and growth to maturity, yet there are many factors which serve to influence the nature and extent of the parent-child relationship and its perception during this period.<sup>82</sup> One of the most important of these is probably the sex of the child in question, as mothers would most probably, and even certainly, have played a greater part in the upbringing of female children than of male ones.<sup>83</sup> The moralist who deals in greatest depth with the subject of childhood is Philippe de Novarre, the first section of his treatise covering the age of 'Anfance'. Philippe, like Etienne de Fougères, attests to the existence of a natural parental love, yet depicts this as belonging equally to father and mother, as well as to grandparents: 'Et l'amor qui est en cels qui les anfanx norrissent, especiaument en pere et en mere, en aiol et en aiole, croist et anforce toz jors'.<sup>84</sup> Here, there is specific mention of both parents, yet as *Les*

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<sup>82</sup> For information on the nurturing of infants and young children see Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, trans. by Chaya Galai (London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>83</sup> See Shahar, *Childhood*, Chapter 10: 'Education in the Nobility', pp. 209-24. Shahar states that many boys destined for knighthood were separated from their mothers between the ages of 7 and 9 (p. 209). For the influence of women on the education of their daughters see Susan Groag Bell, 'Medieval Women Book Owners: Arbiters of Lay Piety and Ambassadors of Culture', *Signs*, 4 (1982), 742-68.

<sup>84</sup> Philippe de Novarre, *Les Quatre Ages*, p. 3. The evidence for parental love supplied by twelfth and thirteenth-century didactic literature (as well as by other genres) contradicts the assertions of such historical theorists as Philippe Ariès, who claims that the recognition of 'childhood' as a separate

*Quatre Ages de l'Homme* as a whole would appear to be directed specifically to a male reader, and the first section of Philippe's discussion of 'Anfance' would often seem to imply the male child alone, it is at times difficult to establish the responsibilities in regard to upbringing and education which Philippe attributes to parents in general and which particularly to the father. For instance, the author cites the exemplum of the young man condemned to be hanged for theft because his father did not give him a sound moral education as a child.<sup>85</sup> The following passage commences: 'Qui norrit anfant ne doit consentir a son pooir ne soffrir que il face males oevres'.<sup>86</sup> The use of the general terms 'qui' and 'anfant' here make it unclear as to whether Philippe holds both parents, or solely the father, responsible for the child's moral education, and whether he is referring to all children, of whichever sex, or only boys. The later responsibility for the provision of a child's scholarly education does, however, appear to be placed firmly on the father: 'Li haut homme et cil qui ont pooir et qui ont assez a faire, et ne pueent entendre a lor anfanz garder et norrir, lor doivent porchacier maistre le meillor qu'il porront'.<sup>87</sup> The following account of the desirable content of a boy's education makes it quite clear that in this instance Philippe is referring to the education of male children alone.<sup>88</sup>

If the initial part of the chapter on 'Anfance' is ambiguous in its gendering of the role and duties of the ideal parent and often in the gender of the 'anfant' in question, the second section of the chapter is generally much clearer. Its opening phrase: 'Vous avez oï des maales; or orrez des femeles' explicitly divides both chapter and content into two.<sup>89</sup> It also retrospectively implies a masculine focus for the whole of the first part of the chapter, an emphasis which is perhaps substantiated by the fact that the

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stage of life, and the sentiment of parental love only began in the seventeenth century. See Ariès, *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973).

<sup>85</sup> Philippe de Novarre, *Les Quatre Ages*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>86</sup> Philippe de Novarre, *Les Quatre Ages*, p. 8.

<sup>87</sup> Philippe de Novarre, *Les Quatre Ages*, p. 12.

<sup>88</sup> Philippe de Novarre, *Les Quatre Ages*, p. 13.

<sup>89</sup> Philippe de Novarre, *Les Quatre Ages*, p. 14.



content of the second part does apply specifically to females. The reference to those responsible for the education and behaviour of girls is also rather more specific than the generalised 'on' of the first section: 'Ne l'an ne doit pas mostrer a son anfant grant samblant d'amor [...] l'an le doit asprement chastier...'.<sup>90</sup> In contrast, the instruction for the training of girls is often directed to: 'Tuit cil et celes qui les norrissent...', thus inscribing the girls' guardians and those responsible for their education as both male and female.<sup>91</sup> The inclusion of the female guardian at this point may once again indicate the exclusively masculine bias and content of the first section. If this is the case, it would appear that Philippe de Novarre ascribes the responsibility for the upbringing and training of the male child to the father alone, while that of the female child is divided between father and mother. At no point does Philippe construct an image of the ideal mother, or depict the duties required specifically of her in regard to the raising of children. Although, as already seen, the father is presented as having a direct responsibility to provide a literary and moral education for his son. The only reference made to the qualities or influence of the mother in particular is significantly an allusion to those 'mauveises fames' who through their own conduct set their daughters a bad example, and who are rightly reproached (in the view of the author) for their lack of morals.<sup>92</sup> Later in life, during 'moien aage' and 'viellesce', the duties of a woman towards her children are indicated, but not in any significant detail. Philippe states:

Les fames de moien aage doivent estre abstinanz, et savoir garder lor anfanx et norrir et croistre, et profiter lor biens et contenir soi simplement, sanz granz despans, por aidier a lor mariz, s'eles les ont, et a lor anfanx et a leur filles marier, s'eles les ont.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Philippe de Novarre, *Les Quatre Ages*, p 6.

<sup>91</sup> Philippe de Novarre, *Les Quatre Ages*, p. 14.

<sup>92</sup> Philippe de Novarre, *Les Quatre Ages*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>93</sup> Philippe de Novarre, *Les Quatre Ages*, pp. 88-89.

The maternal duties of old age are essentially the same, listing the raising of children and the arranging of their marriages as one unemphasised aspect of a wife's duties.<sup>94</sup> Even in the case of these older women, it is on their self-restraint and physical/ sexual containment that the didactic emphasis rests, as Philippe de Novarre speaks of the unchaste woman continuing in her 'sin' even in old age.<sup>95</sup>

The consideration of the existence and function of the 'good woman' in her role as mother has of necessity concentrated most fully on *Les Quatre Ages de l'Homme*, as it is this text alone which treats the subject of childhood and the raising of children in any appreciable detail. From the significant lack of reference to maternal duties and indeed, to the figure of the mother herself, it would appear that the aim of constructing an appropriate model of social motherhood was not one which was generally encompassed by twelfth and thirteenth-century didactic literature. The aim of this was rather to formulate or reproduce a didactic strategy for the sexual containment of women. This strategy may ultimately be perceived as a means of ensuring female access to a legitimate and socially relevant form of motherhood, but it is on the achievement of this that the didactic focus and intent may be seen to lie, and not on the subsequent feminine role of mothering.

#### PHYSICAL/ SPIRITUAL MOTHERHOOD

One image of motherhood which does appear in a highly essentialised form is that of the woman who gives generously to the Church, and who may be seen to 'nurture' in a specifically religious or spiritual context. This giving of alms is endorsed by

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<sup>94</sup> Philippe de Novarre, *Les Quatre Ages*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>95</sup> Philippe de Novarre ascribes this partly to women's continuing sexual abilities: 'Et por dire qu'eles ne sont pas vieilles ne remeses, font toz jors pechiez de lor cors [...] eles ont toz jors pooir de sosfrir le pechié en eles' (*Les Quatre Ages*, p. 100).

Philippe de Novarre: 'En fame ne puet estre largesce bone que une: ele puet doner aumones largement por Dieu, par le congié de son mari, por les ames d'aus, se il ont quoi'.<sup>96</sup> Any other kind of generosity is immediately suspect; Philippe continues: 'et quant on voit fame trop large, toz jors doute l'an qu'ele ne soit large de son cors ausis comme de l'avoir'. However, it is Etienne de Fougères who links it implicitly with a displaced maternity through the dedication of his work to the Countess of Hereford and his subsequent praise of her as a woman who has lost her children and who now dedicates her life to the Church. Although Etienne does indicate the joys of parenthood, as seen above, he follows this by a depiction of its miseries, as the parents impoverish themselves for their children:

por els robent et por els tolent,  
 por els empruntent et ne solent;  
  
 lor cors en usent et travaillent;  
 gages prennent et gages baillent;  
 chasteaus aseent, chasteaus assaillent.  
 Quant tot ont fet, mourent et faillent. (ll. 1195-1200)

Sexual reproduction, even in the context of legitimate marriage, is therefore seen to bring physical suffering and spiritual contamination. The production of children necessarily enthralls both men and women in worldly and ultimately fruitless concerns, despite the earlier reference to children as the 'good fruit' of a marriage.<sup>97</sup> This denigration of physical parenthood prepares the way for the poet's description of the Countess of Hereford, a woman who has borne children, yet all of whom have died. The Countess is therefore not inscribed into the category of religious women dedicated to a purely spiritual life, yet it is the Church which now provides the outlet for her nurturing qualities.<sup>98</sup> Jeri Guthrie regards this as a portrayal of 'La pure mère: le déplacement de ses qualités maternelles vers les pauvres et l'Eglise la rend en même

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<sup>96</sup> Philippe de Novarre, *Les Quatre Ages*, p. 16.

<sup>97</sup> Etienne de Fougères, *Le Livre des manières*, l. 1187.

<sup>98</sup> Etienne de Fougères, *Le Livre des manières*, ll. 1209-20.

temps "mère de l'Eglise" et "ornement du Seigneur" '.<sup>99</sup> This religious interpretation of the role of the Countess may be linked with Etienne's earlier conventional opposition of Eve and the Virgin Mary.<sup>100</sup> Whilst Eve is represented in contemporary society by the 'riche dame' of Etienne's estate of women, the counterpart of the Virgin may be read as the Countess of Hereford, a mother whose spiritual qualities predominate over her physical motherhood.

The Countess may be perceived and depicted by Etienne de Fougères as the only woman in the whole of his category of women who is worthy of praise, but it is significant that the social and economic requirement and ideal of womanhood here remains unfulfilled. The fundamental opposition between the religious and the secular ideal is underlined by Guthrie: 'La femme parfaite, c'est une mère sans enfants: dans le domaine économique, cependant, une femme à répudier, et dans le domaine spirituel, la femme à vénérer'.<sup>101</sup> The Countess is evidently not 'la femme parfaite' in the secular context, as she has provided no living heirs for the patrimony, but neither may she be read as truly or conventionally 'perfect' in religious terms, but only inadvertently so. The Countess is, first of all, neither virginal nor chaste (as far as this may be inferred), and the death of her children does not automatically indicate a rejection of the physical and the body in favour of the spiritual. Etienne de Fougères does, however, imply that the Countess represents this choice and the placing of the spiritual over the physical, as his appeal to her judgement on the depicted miseries of parenthood implies her agreement.<sup>102</sup> She is not, moreover, depicted as a grieving mother.

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<sup>99</sup> Guthrie, 'La Femme dans *Le Livre des manières*', p. 258.

<sup>100</sup> Etienne de Fougères, *Le Livre des manières*, ll. 1140-56.

<sup>101</sup> Guthrie, 'La Femme dans *Le Livre des manières*', p. 259.

<sup>102</sup> Etienne de Fougères, *Le Livre des manières*, ll. 1205-08.

A significant and fundamental point in the context of the perception of motherhood is that the Countess of Hereford is not, or at least is no longer, a mother, if a 'mother' is defined as a woman who has children, rather than one who has borne children. She may be regarded by Guthrie as 'la pure mère' and 'la femme parfaite', yet it is her religious devotion and her generosity which render her 'pure' or 'perfect', and not the fact that she is either a woman or a mother. It is the spiritualisation of qualities perceived as particularly, if not specifically, maternal, that is being venerated by Etienne de Fougères, rather than the spirituality of an actual, physical mother. Indeed, the conclusion to *Le Livre des Manières* forcefully indicates a religious moral interpretation for the whole of the section relating to women, as Etienne stresses the frailty and decay of the flesh and the superiority of the spirit within, condemning in particular any reliance on fleeting feminine beauty.<sup>103</sup>

The image of a spiritual motherhood is one which inherently entails the depiction of the 'maternal' qualities of compassion, love and nurture, and a woman possessing and utilising these to religious ends may be valorised. Yet the manifestation of maternal qualities does not necessitate physical motherhood. As seen in the Introduction, a spiritual conception of the maternal may be appropriated by anyone, even by men, yet it appears singularly absent from the secular didactic literature devoted to a construction of an ideal of the feminine. Certainly, women as mothers in general do not feature to any marked extent in this form of literature, and the only one to whom 'spiritual' maternal qualities are applied, the Countess of Hereford, is not herself a true, physical mother. In religious thought of the time it would appear that a rejection of the physical is a necessary counterpart to an accession to the spiritual; a renunciation of the body and carnality equating with a form of spiritual cleansing. If a woman must be seen to be spiritually pure in order to be spiritually 'maternal' or mothering, then as

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<sup>103</sup> 'Fleire chose est biauté de cors, / n'i a bel fors la pel defors; / mes qui verreit dedenz le cors, / pareit quel i est li tensors' (Etienne de Fougères, *Le Livre des manières*, ll. 1241-44).

a physical mother she may surely not be regarded as appropriate, her visible, physical children acting to tie her implacably to the body. This apparent exclusion of the physical mother from the realm of the spiritual is reinforced by the body/ spirit opposition of thirteenth-century religious ideology, which inscribed the female as flesh and the male as spirit. In a similar way, physical maternity and spiritual maternity are placed in opposition. Physical maternity implies sexual activity and the production of children to fulfil the economic and political requirements of the social order, while spiritual maternity excludes this, and concentrates instead on the moral and spiritual qualities that may be perceived as particularly 'maternal' and therefore desirable in a spiritual, religious context. In this dichotomous relation only one or the other state may be entered or appropriated, the physical mother therefore being excluded and denied access to the state of spiritual motherhood by her very definition as a maternal being.

The strategies of containment operating in the didactic texts considered here are constructed in answer to a masculine discourse of lineage and inheritance. Formulated and projected in order to protect the patrilinear structure of society, the attempted imposition of a code of idealised female behaviour is one which is fundamentally undercut by the very fact of its perceived necessity. Furthermore, the paradox of the genre's articulation of masculine desire -- the public desire for the chaste and contained woman; the private desire for the erotic gaze -- renders the content as well as the form of the didactic text ambiguous and unstable. Although not classified as a 'literary' form, the didactic text may be read as a fiction, the lineaments of a romance rendered in prescriptive form. The image of gender roles and of gender relations which it constructs is essentially a vision of masculine desire and of masculine fear. This polarisation of the two models of femininity, the chaste and the unchaste woman, is one which can be read throughout all forms of literary production in the Middle Ages. Both are fictions, and both are bound within the frame of masculine vision. It is this



framing of female, particularly maternal, characters and its relation to the masculine order of text and society which will now be considered in a more specifically literary context. The significance of the mother in the veiled fiction of femininity spun by the didactic treatise is one which is implied, rather than underscored. The emphasis and focus of male didacticism lies most evidently on the strategies which it employs for female sexual containment. How is this elision of a strategically important maternal presence translated to the narrative context? And how is the bounding of the feminine in terms of the body envisioned in the more evident fictions of romance and *chansons de geste*?

## CHAPTER 2

### THE PERIPHERAL MOTHER : ROMANCE NARRATIVES

The paradox of a being that is at once captive and absent in discourse, constantly spoken of but in itself inaudible or inexpressible, displayed as spectacle and still unrepresented or unrepresentable, invisible yet constituted as the object and the guarantee of vision; a being whose existence and specificity are simultaneously asserted and denied, negated and controlled.<sup>1</sup>

The depiction of female character in the romance is a topic which has provoked much critical debate.<sup>2</sup> From being viewed as the genre which privileged women, its narratives giving an exalted image of the courtly *dame* and articulating the desires of a female audience, the radical shift to the general critical position of the present day is striking.<sup>3</sup> Although romance may be seen to allocate a greater narrative space to female character than does the *chanson de geste*, it is recognised that this does not necessarily equate with any real acknowledgement of female autonomy. As Simon Gaunt states, drawing on the studies of Roberta Krueger: ' "women" in romance are signs in a male discourse'.<sup>4</sup> Female character is bound within the frame of masculine vision and desire, constructed in response to its demands. Yet Gaunt sees the romance as assigning a particular role to women within the matrix of its social and

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<sup>1</sup> Teresa de Lauretis, 'Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness', *Feminist Studies*, 16 (1990), 115-50 (p. 115).

<sup>2</sup> This chapter considers the depiction of the mother in the verse romance alone, as it is this form which may be read as paralleling, and as compliment of, the *chanson de geste*, which forms the focus of Chapters 3-5. The later prose romance may well provide a different image of the mother and of familial relations in general, yet this is not a subject which will be covered here.

<sup>3</sup> For the notion of romance literature as privileging women see Rita Lejeune, 'La Femme dans les littératures française et occitane du XIe au XIIe siècles', *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale*, 20 (1977), 201-17. For the greater autonomy of women in general during the Middle Ages as opposed to the Renaissance see Joan Kelly-Gadol, 'Did Women have a Renaissance?', in Bridenthal and Koonz (eds), *Becoming Visible*, pp. 137-64. The more recent view of the construction of female character in romance as reflecting male subjectivity and desire is found in Krueger, *Women Readers*.

<sup>4</sup> Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, p. 72.

textual relations. This is effectively one of mediator, the transfer of women serving to create bonds between men.<sup>5</sup> Gaunt states:

But although women are more important in romance than in epic, romance merely replaces one type of male bonding with another. [...] The close homosocial bonds of the epic, which frequently exclude women altogether, are a threat to a new ideology which foregrounds the individual at the expense of the group.<sup>6</sup>

This perceived prominence of women in romance is, however, not one which allows for the development of the female role. The inscription of woman as nexus in the male homosocial structure of the genre does not, in fact, say anything about the depiction of female character, for 'woman' here remains sign. If such is the case, the differentiation between the construction of male-male relationships in *chanson de geste* and in romance then becomes somewhat difficult, as the insertion of woman as mediating sign and masculine construct does not necessarily imply a loosening or disturbing of the bonds constructed between men.<sup>7</sup> As Sarah Kay's recent study suggests, the relation between epic and romance can be seen as dialectical rather than oppositional.<sup>8</sup> In contrast to Gaunt, Kay would appear to view romance as fundamentally more cohesive in its depiction of male homosocial relationships:

Epic and romance texts of the same period would appear to be describing different political worlds. However ironic, the dreamy successes of

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<sup>5</sup> Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, pp. 73-74. This type of female mediation is, however, also apparent in the epic, where women would appear to have a more varied textual representation and a greater ability to function as active protagonists in the course of the narrative. See Chapters 3-5 for further details.

<sup>6</sup> Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, p. 83.

<sup>7</sup> The masculine coherence of the epic community is, in any case, debatable. In his previous chapter of *Gender and Genre*, Gaunt points to the instability of the notion of a 'monologic masculinity' when applied to the *chanson de geste*: 'Despite the best endeavours of some poets, the genre fails to become monologic' (p. 52). However, he then views the romance as seeking to marginalise this monologic ideal in favour of a dialogic construction of gender: 'In contradistinction to the *chansons de geste*, romance constructs masculinity in relation to femininity, developing a strong sense of alterity. It is therefore significant that at a formative stage in the genre's development early romances enact the marginalization of what I have called the epic's monologic construction of masculinity' (p. 75). See also p. 85.

<sup>8</sup> Kay, *The 'Chansons de geste'*.

romance heroes stress the potential for male bonding, and play down the consequences of inter-male strife.<sup>9</sup>

The significant point in both of these readings of the male homosocial structure of romance is that the emphasis lies emphatically upon the bonds between men. Yet if the image of women is reduced to that of commodity -- token of exchange between men, or to an idealised fiction of masculine desire, what kind of narrative space does this allow to the mother and to the maternal voice?

In a male homosocial structure where female character figures as mediating sign, maternal presence is inscribed as absence or lack. A link may here be read with the masculine concerns of didactic texts, as seen in the previous chapter. In both didactic treatises and in romance the focus rests on the depiction of women prior to marriage, and both forms of literature reveal a concern over the nature of the woman entering into marriage and potential motherhood. Once assigned in marriage, the female character in romance loses her significance as a mobile token of exchange and thus her ability to function further in the male homosocial system. Susan Aronstein states: 'Once these bonds [between men] have been established, women can be eliminated from any further narrative or political action'.<sup>10</sup> The woman as mother is then suppressed, her maternal presence given no voice by the text. Aronstein concludes:

From her new place outside of the text she can silently assure the continuation of the prevailing order through the bearing of children while leaving the romance narrative free to explore its real concerns -- the nature of homosocial order and the political and power relationships that bind men together -- without the potentially disruptive distraction of women.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Kay, *The 'Chansons de geste'*, p. 234. She also views the epic as representing women as characters and commentators, rather than as objects of desire, as in the romance, whereas Gaunt would appear to ignore the space and the voice which the *chanson de geste* allows to women.

<sup>10</sup> Aronstein, 'Prize or Pawn?', p. 126.

<sup>11</sup> Aronstein, 'Prize or Pawn?', p. 126. She is here referring in particular to the *Gawain Continuation*, which forms the basis of her study, yet this theory would apply equally well to other romance narratives.

The maternal character is here explicitly placed outside the text; a text whose concerns are defined as specifically masculine in orientation, as discussed above. Women are perceived as the means of binding together and of continuing the social order, yet at the same time they appear to play no part in this functioning of this order. Their role, according to Aronstein's reading, is token, both as items of exchange and as characters in the narrative structure.<sup>12</sup> Aronstein emphasises the inherent impossibility for the mother to function as transferable token of exchange; the transition of a woman from female to maternal sign then becomes problematic, for the mother apparently lacks a role, and is therefore expelled from the narrative. Yet in addition to reflecting the romance focus on the 'woman as sign', this suppression of the mother can also be read as product of the genre's framing of the female character as sexualised object.

The romance focus on the woman as object, as reflection of a masculine desire, parallels the didactic text's reduction of woman to the female body. In both genres the notion of woman is bounded and contained within a dichotomous frame of desire. The social desire, and demand, for female sexual containment conflicts with the masculine desire for the sexualised female image. Although repressed in the didactic text, the erotic image surfaces as textual counter to its own social suppression.<sup>13</sup> Within romance the male ambivalence over the depiction of this female image may not be subject to the same veiling and dissimulation, yet the concern for its ultimate containment is still apparent. The suppression of the mother can then be read as paralleling that in didactic works. If the focus of the text's depiction of women lies on

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<sup>12</sup> See Jane Burns, *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993) for the opposing view. Burns sees the gendering of narrative character as female as productive of a different kind of speech. As she explains: 'Bodytalk [...] is not something that authors make their characters do. It is a reading strategy that enables us, as contemporary feminists, to acknowledge the difference that the rhetorical woman's body might make in our potential readings of fictive women's speech' (p. 241). Although this reading of the female voice may be seen as a means of restructuring 'the social and rhetorical conventions used to figure femininity' (p. 241) in the medieval text, its deliberate tendentiousness, based on the interpretation of the modern feminist reader, would appear to divorce textuality too rigorously from its interpretation.

<sup>13</sup> As in the case of Robert de Blois' prescriptive *Chastoiement des dames*, see Chapter 1.

the sexualised female body and on the containment of its sexuality, then the mother is immediately marginalised. The reproductive body of the mother is inherently other than the sexual female body -- the maternal image cannot be framed in terms of the eroticised feminine.<sup>14</sup>

That there are maternal characters in romance is undeniable, yet these would generally seem to appear as peripheral figures, set outside the main focus of the narrative. The generic factors which may be seen to influence this type of depiction are many; the most important studies in this area being those on kinship structure in the epic by Michael Heintze, and in epic and romance by Dorothea Kullmann.<sup>15</sup> While the present study does not aim to provide a similar comparative overview of the maternal role in general, but to focus on the depiction of the mother in specific texts, it is important to relate this to the more bounded nature of kinship relations in the romance and to the genre's concentration on the individual, rather than on the community. This latter emphasis tends to be a concentration on youth; on the son rather than on the father. As Kullmann states:

Dabei fällt die starke Idealisierung der jüngeren Generationen auf. Sowohl in Onkel-Neffe- als auch in Vater-Sohn-Relationen steht die jüngere Person im Mittelpunkt, sie ist es, die die Handlung bestimmt oder Erfolg hat.<sup>16</sup>

This focus on the individuality of the young hero is seen to limit his depiction as a key element in a matrix of kin-relations.<sup>17</sup> Although the preceding generation is depicted,

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<sup>14</sup> This divide between the maternal body and the erotic body finds its reflection in religious discourse, the image of the Virgin Mary being the prime example of the mother as asexual being. The disassociation of the mother from sexuality can also be read as necessary in psychoanalytic terms, the rejection of the mother as object of desire being a requisite for both male and female entry into the Symbolic. See in particular Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

<sup>15</sup> Heintze, *König, Held und Sippe*; Kullmann, *Verwandschaft in epischer Dichtung*.

<sup>16</sup> Kullmann, *Verwandschaft in epischer Dichtung*, p. 206. See Section 3, pp. 115-207, for details of kin-relations and structure in the later romances of the twelfth century.

<sup>17</sup> 'So erscheinen die Romanenfiguren im Gegensatz zu den Epenhelden nicht in ein Verwandschaftskollektiv eingebettet; Verwandschaftskollektive werden überhaupt nicht dargestellt' (Kullmann, *Verwandschaft in epischer Dichtung*, p. 206).



it is the paternal, rather than the maternal, role which appears significant in regard to the hero's consolidation of his identity as an individual, suggesting the articulation of a world view which is decidedly patriarchal in orientation.<sup>18</sup> The individual consciousness which the narrative seeks to explore is constructed as male and depicted in relation to a transcendent paternity. The maternal role thus appears peripheral to the masculine emphasis of the genre and to the focus of the narrative. The following study will consider particular texts which reveal various aspects of the depiction of the mother in romance, as absence, or as marginalised presence. As stated above, the aim is not to provide an overview of the genre's construction of the maternal in general, but to focus upon particular instances which serve to illuminate the positioning of the mother as peripheral to its primary orientation towards the patriarchal.

#### THE REPRODUCTIVE SIGN

*Guillaume de Dole*, by Jean Renart (c. 1228), falls into the category of the wager romance, in which the heroine is falsely accused and later proved innocent.<sup>19</sup> The significant feature of these texts is their play between the construction and subsequent displacement of the masculine ideal of the feminine. This recalls the dichotomy set up by the didactic text, where the ideal woman is opposed by her anti-type.<sup>20</sup> The heroine of *Guillaume*, Liënor, is a character whose form and function reflect the generic traits

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<sup>18</sup> For example in Chrétien de Troyes *Perceval*, or Marie de France's *Yonec*, where the dead father takes on a symbolic function (Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Conte du Graal ou Le Roman de Perceval*, ed. by Charles Méla, *Lettres Gothiques* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1990); Marie de France, *Lais de Marie de France*, ed. by Karl Warnke and trans. by Laurence Harf-Lancner, *Lettres Gothiques* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1990) ).

<sup>19</sup> Jean Renart, *Le Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole*, ed. by Félix Lecoy, C.F.M.A. (Paris: Champion, 1962). For a discussion of this and the other wager romances of *Le Roman du Comte de Poitiers*, *Le Roman de la Violette*, and *Li Contes du Roi Floire et de la Belle Jehane* see Krueger, *Women Readers*, Chapter 5.

<sup>20</sup> Krueger views the wager romances, apart from *Guillaume de Dole*, as inherently more didactic than critical in their aim: 'These and other idealizing romances undoubtedly played a role in shaping traditional gender roles in the social education of some medieval men and women' (*Women Readers*, p. 155).

discussed above. She is the embodiment and reflection of masculine desire, her value as reproductive sign essentialised in a virginity which is transferred between her brother, Guillaume, and the emperor Conrad. Liënor's character and her function within the narrative provide the focus of the poem until she enters into marriage at its closure. In the present context *Guillaume de Dole* provides a useful example of the way in which the emphasis of romance in regard to the reproductive value of women lies not on the character of the mother and her depiction as reproductive sign, but upon the potentiality of this role. The female body of the romance may appear sexualised, yet the strategies which the text employs in its containment reveal the fundamental anxiety over the active deployment of this sexuality.

The whole textual scheme of *Guillaume* hinges upon the question of Liënor's virginity, or lack of it; virginity being the signal of her suitability to become wife to the Emperor Conrad.<sup>21</sup> The imperative for the royal lineage to be continued is marked as a means of ensuring a social continuity (ll. 121-35) and underscored by the words of the barons: 'Se ciz bers, qui est mieudres d'autres, / muert sanz hoir, nos somes tuit mort!' (ll. 126-27). Of lesser rank and wealth than Conrad, Liënor would not initially appear to be the ideal candidate for the role of wife and prospective royal mother.<sup>22</sup> Yet the vision of the romance heroine which the text projects leaves no doubt as to her worth. Liënor's intrinsic value is measured specifically in terms of the body -- her outstanding beauty and her undoubted purity. Her idealised image is first introduced to Conrad through the telling of a romantic tale (ll. 657-722), a fiction to which she

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<sup>21</sup> Lineage and its continuation is seen to be a concern in this romance, yet the nature of this concern contrasts inherently with that of the *chanson de geste* (see Chapter 3 below). In *Guillaume* the emphasis would appear to lie on Conrad as emperor, rather than as individual hero. The requirement for the regal line to be continued surpasses the desire of the text for Conrad's own personal qualities to be passed on, despite the text's inscription of these (ll. 47-103). In addition, the patrilineage is here bound within the context of this particular narrative, rather than forming part of an intertextual cycle, as in the case of many *chansons de geste*. The context of patrilinear succession thus appears bounded and foreclosed.

<sup>22</sup> This fact does not, however, preclude the marriage entirely; Erec of *Erec et Enide* takes a wife of a lower rank.

and her brother Guillaume are then compared. Lïenor herself is thus inscribed as a fiction, a reflected image of the romance heroine in the tale told between two men. This is reinforced by Conrad's immediate desire for her at the pronunciation of her name:

-- Sire, el a non Lïenors,  
ce dit li nons de la pucele.'  
Amors l'a cuit d'une estencele  
de cel biau non mout pres del cuer;  
or li seront, sachiez, d'un fuer  
totes les autres por cesti. (ll. 791-96)

As pointed out by Krueger, what Conrad loves 'is not a woman, but the name of a woman, a sign that describes the desired woman as an absence'.<sup>23</sup> The fiction which is Lïenor is bound within Conrad's own desire; a desire then projected on to the name which signifies the female space within the text. The name may indicate absence, but, paradoxically, can also be read as indicating the inherent value of the sign which is Lïenor. The connotations of value and riches which the name suggests -- 'Lïenor' ('en or') -- set a market value on this woman's idealised beauty. The qualifying 'bele' added to her name (ll. 920; 1002; 1089), and the linkage of name and bloneness: 'Lïenors as blons chevouls' (l. 827), 'mout avoit blons les cheveuls' (l. 1126) underscore both the physicality of the image and its value.<sup>24</sup>

As a fiction, told and re-told by one character to another, the image of Lïenor is composed and transmitted to the audience through a layering of textual voices. Her value is effectively assigned to her by the male characters of the text, who themselves embroider and elaborate the fiction of her worth. For Guillaume, she is his 'tresor' (l.

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<sup>23</sup> Krueger, *Women Readers*, p. 148.

<sup>24</sup> The description of Lïenor matches perfectly with that of the fiction described by Joulet, as they both possess the stereotypical physical qualities of the romance heroine, including undulating blonde hair (ll. 695-710). In the case of Lïenor, however, this may be held to be of greater symbolic significance than usual, connecting as it does with the symbolic value of her name and the repeated equating of her with treasure and wealth. For details of the symbolic value of hair colour in folktale and legend see Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairytales and their Tellers* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994), pp. 353-86.

1115), enclosed and guarded from the sight of other men.<sup>25</sup> For the messenger who reports back to Conrad Liënor's value is again conceived in terms of gold and wealth:

--Voire, fet il, ce n'est pas doute,  
non d'une chose, mes de toute,  
de braz, de cors, de chief, de vis.  
Aussi passe, ce m'est avis,  
de beauté bele Liënors  
totes les autres, com li ors  
toz les autres metails du monde. (ll. 1414-20)

As a fiction told between men, it is the image of Liënor which first acts to create a bond between Conrad and Guillaume; their companionship is then cemented by Conrad's decision to marry her and Guillaume's agreement (ll. 3016-97). It is significant that Liënor herself plays no part in this mediation of herself and her fictionalised body. She remains an abstract image of desire which is only troubled by the seneschal's desire to break apart the friendship of Conrad and Guillaume (ll. 3153-61; 3214-17). Krueger suggests: 'The seneschal's divulgence of the "mout veraie ensaigne", his utterance of the secret of female sexuality, destroys Conrad's poetic system, which was based on woman as an *absence*'.<sup>26</sup> The seneschal's words inscribe an alternative fiction, one which is seen as marking the *presence* of woman through its emphasis on her active sexuality. Yet this extent to which this sexuality is itself also a fiction remains ambiguous. Although the seneschal claims to have seen the rose on Liënor's 'cuisse blanche et tendre' (l. 3365), the implication of carnal knowledge and the focus on the physical sign or metaphor of sexuality, the rose itself, are still only words.<sup>27</sup> As Kay states:

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<sup>25</sup> The mother of Guillaume and Liënor tells the seneschal: 'nuls hom ne la puet veoir / puis que ses freres n'est çaienz' (ll. 3388-89). Susan Aronstein points to the relevance of Georges Duby's study of medieval household layout in regard to the maintaining of women's chastity: 'the women of the house, both those already bought (wives and fiancées) and those who were potential merchandise (daughters and sisters), were confined, for the most part, in the women's dormitory, an upper chamber without either internal privacy or outside access' ('Prize or Pawn?', p. 119).

<sup>26</sup> Krueger, *Women Readers*, p. 149.

<sup>27</sup> The voyeurism implicit in *Guillaume de Dole* is reminiscent of that of *Le Chastoiement des Dames*, by Robert de Blois (Chapter 1). This is particularly evident in the 'hunting'/ feasting scene (ll. 160-550), where the main prey appears to be 'tante dame estroite a laz, / en chaines ridez lor biaux cors; / s'ont chevex ondoianz et sors, / chapelez d'or a clers rubiz' (ll. 196-99). The enumeration of

In the *Rose*, control over the heroine's body is only ever discursive, not penetrative, as all the noble male characters, one after the other, rehearse their knowledge of the 'rose on the thigh'.<sup>28</sup>

Yet, as signalled by Philippe de Novarre in the *Quatre Ages de l'homme*, semblance and reputation are as critical as substance.<sup>29</sup> The male fear of the potential deployment of an active female sexuality is sufficient marker of its underlying presence. Once Liënor's virginity is believed lost, in the words of Conrad: 'Ses pris est mout desavanciez' (l. 3700). Deflowered in words, and thus no longer Guillaume's 'tresor', Liënor loses her youthful freshness, her bloom, and becomes 'la vieus, la jaianz, la jaieus' (l. 3807). The fiction of female beauty spun by the narrative so far is seen to be a veiling of the true nature of woman's worth in the frame of male social relations. The fiction of female sexuality lies within that of the woman as passive ideal and transferable item of value, functioning as underlying yet constant counterpoint. Although its actuality is foreclosed in the context of *Guillaume*, in that Liënor retains her virginity, the image of active sexuality which the poem projects through the seneschal's account is one which seems inherently more real than the fiction of Liënor as ideal and circumscribed woman.

Liënor's departure from the sheltering confines of home (ll. 4046-109) could be read as signalling a significant shift in her characterisation and function.<sup>30</sup> Her entry into the outside world appears to mark a new phase of autonomous female action which contrasts with the passivity of Conrad and Guillaume at this point in the narrative. Yet the move from interior to exterior marks also the shift from containment to expansion as Liënor enters into the persona which the seneschal has constructed for her -- that of

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bodily features is echoed in the romanticised female image of the tale told to Conrad (ll. 691-722), an image which mirrors that of Liënor herself.

<sup>28</sup> Kay, *The 'Chansons de geste'*, p. 167.

<sup>29</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>30</sup> 'In the context of these multiple appropriations of woman as object/ sign, and in contrast to the men's passivity, Liënor's ascension as an active subject in the last third of the romance is remarkable' (Krueger, *Women Readers*, p. 149).

sexually active woman. From this point on it is Liënor's 'grant sens' which serves to structure the action of the narrative, the male characters playing out the roles allotted to them in a fiction of her own devising. In addition, her image is no longer mediated through the gaze of the male characters, but is presented directly by author to audience, a move which acts to reinforce the impression of her presence as subject in the text, rather than as an objectified vision of femininity. The author's appreciation and depiction of Liënor in terms other than those of objectified physical beauty is most apparent as she presents her case against the seneschal before Conrad and his court (ll. 4709-853).<sup>31</sup> Although Liënor's beauty is still greatly emphasised -- so much so that as she arrives the onlookers cannot tell whether she is 'fee ou fame' (l. 4689) -- it is her wisdom and intelligence which are here underscored. The author states:

Si vos di, s'ele fust as lois  
.v. anz toz plains sanz remouvoir,  
ce sachiez de fi et de voir,  
je ne sai por coi ne coment  
ele peüst plus belement  
son claim dire ne son afere. (ll. 4768-73)

Yet in her accusation against the seneschal, it is Liënor herself who picks up and continues the theme of female virginity as wealth, thus linking her own perception of herself with that previously presented by Conrad and Guillaume, and re-affirming the impression of her worth as a virginal object of exchange.<sup>32</sup> Her accusation is one of rape, but also of robbery, as she declaims to Conrad:

Ice demant au seneschal:  
et m'onor et mon pucelage  
et de mes joiaus le damage. (ll. 4788-90)

<sup>31</sup> After having made a gift of jewels and a belt to the seneschal, purporting to come from an admirer, Liënor accuses him of rape and theft.

<sup>32</sup> Conrad makes this virginity-wealth link quite specifically before Liënor's fall from grace: 'Bien prent terre et avoir li hom / qui la prent bone et sage et bele / et de bon lignage et pucele' (ll. 3520-22).



Lienor's manipulation of the situation, twisting the seneschal's claim -- to have had sexual relations with her -- back against him, could be seen as the female accession to speech and thus to power; a female appropriation of the male subject position of weaver of words and producer of narrative.<sup>33</sup> Yet although she is able to form and project her own fiction of events to counter the equal untruth of the seneschal's fiction, this serves only to re-inscribe her in her original place in the textual and social order. The potential of the autonomous fiction which Lienor spins is bound in with her accession to the prior fiction of the seneschal, which posits her as autonomous and self-disposing character. Once she herself negates this potential for autonomy by proving the seneschal's claim is a lie, she is of necessity re-inscribed as the image of contained and inactive woman.

Through the deployment of Lienor herself as the agent of narrative action the author paradoxically re-affirms woman's function as passive sign. In the latter section of the poem Lienor may function as unmediated character, rather than being discussed as an absent fiction, yet the ultimate aim of this depiction is the re-affirmation of the previously voiced values of the text (values voiced by male characters). The male anxiety over an active female sexuality is countered by the woman's own denial of its operation. Rather than functioning as silent token of exchange, the female character is given a voice, yet this is but a further reflection of the predominant masculine discourse. This depiction of Lienor as active agent in her own vindication contrasts with the passivity of the heroines of *Le Roman du Comte de Poitiers* and *Le Roman de la violette*, a shift of characterisation on the part of Jean Renart which serves to strengthen the impression of a female acquiescence to the masculine value system.<sup>34</sup> Lienor's role as calumniated woman functions as a further extension of her image as the embodiment of masculine desire, as she transcends the slander to repossess the

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<sup>33</sup> It is also an inversion of the 'Potiphar's wife' motif, indicating Lienor's lack of sexual behaviour, and her implied inscribing into the role of wife.

<sup>34</sup> See Krueger, *Women Readers*, p. 133.

ideal.<sup>35</sup> She remains a fiction of femininity throughout the poem, one which is deployed to masculine ends, whether delineated as absent ideal, or as active protagonist.

Although *Guillaume de Dole* reveals itself as significantly aware of the potentially disruptive force of an unbounded female sexuality, this fear is closed down; the feminine ideal re-affirmed. The treasure of Liënor's virginity assures her valid accession to the role of wife and mother, although in contrast to the form of the *chanson de geste*, the poem closes with no prediction of future nativity. Despite the narrative's concern over the containment of female sexuality prior to marriage, and its closure before the transition from female to maternal sign is made, there is, nonetheless, a maternal presence in *Guillaume*. The mother of Guillaume and Liënor is not named, and appears only briefly, yet her role is of considerable importance to the narrative plot. It is she who is companion to Liënor, and who keeps her secluded from male eyes when Guillaume is absent from home. When the seneschal arrives, wishing to see Liënor, the mother keeps her pact with her son and refuses access to her daughter (ll. 3335-39). Yet the fault which she then commits, by revealing the existence of the rose birthmark, is far greater. Although depicted earlier as a courteous and a loving mother (ll. 1236-37; 3326-27), the episode which takes place between the mother and the seneschal inscribes her quite differently. The negative 'feminine' traits of greed, garrulity, and stupidity all serve to define her character -- she accepts the gift of a precious ring (ll. 3346-51), and sees no harm in revealing 'tot son estrè et son covine' (l. 3357). As the author comments: 'Uns beaus dons a mout grant mecine, / qu'il fet maint mal plet dire et fere' (ll. 3358-59).<sup>36</sup> Félix Lecoy suggests that the

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<sup>35</sup> Rita Lejeune, however, views the female characters of the text, Liënor and her mother, as being depicted with a particular realism. Of the former's denunciation of the seneschal, Lejeune states: 'elle est caractéristique du réalisme de l'auteur, réalisme psychologique autant que verbale', *L'Oeuvre de Jean Renart: Contribution à l'étude du genre romanesque au Moyen Age* (Paris: Droz, 1935), p. 46.

<sup>36</sup> The foolishness of women's speech here links with the view expressed by the authors of didactic texts, who warn women to speak little (Chapter 1).

mother, although a 'mère particulièrement stupide', is 'fière naïvement de la beauté de son enfant'.<sup>37</sup> This does not, however, really serve to explain the motivation behind the mother's revelation of the most intimate details about her daughter. For this she is censured by the author, whose prophecy: 'Chetive vielle hors dou sens / si mar vit cel jor et cele heure!' (ll. 3378-79), evidently lays all the blame for the subsequent accusation and devaluation of Liënor firmly at the door of her mother.

Within this brief tracing of the traits of the mother there would appear to be no indication that she herself is required to conform to a narrative ideal. Equally, there is no suggestion that her personal characteristics will be inherited by her children. This apparent individuality and self-enclosure of the maternal character is significant in two respects. Firstly, it does not conform to the natural scientific beliefs of the period, which posited a metaphysical, as well as physical, link between mother and child. Secondly, it contrasts with the genealogical importance of the mother in the *chanson de geste*. As considered in the next chapter, the delineation of maternal character in the epic is shaped by certain topoi. As a romance, *Guillaume de Dole* does not ascribe to this same genealogical imperative. The prospective role of Liënor may be to ensure the royal succession, yet although the poem's awareness of a potential maternity is present, the maternal role itself appears foreclosed. The maternal space does not, in fact, truly exist, for the romance does not set Liënor into a genealogical frame which extends beyond the self-enclosed bounds of the present narrative. The role which her own mother plays is actually that of duenna, a narrative device which functions as the catalyst for the main theme of the plot. The mother's character comprises the negative traits assigned to women in misogynistic discourse, yet beyond this she has no being or function. She is not defined by the author as having any particular depth of character, and neither can she really be seen to function as a maternal sign, for it is not

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<sup>37</sup> *Guillaume de Dole*, Introduction, pp. xii; ix.

her actual maternity which is of relevance to the plot. If the maternal space of the narrative is acknowledged, through the existence of the mother-character and through Lïenor's own potential maternity, it is only inscribed as absence. Both Lïenor and her mother present differing aspects of the 'woman as sign' described by Gaunt and Krueger. Both characters can be read as constructs of masculine desire or misogyny, but neither is able to fulfil the maternal potential towards which the romance gestures, but which it forecloses.

### MARGINALITY

If the mother is absent in *Guillaume de Dole*, the father is also significantly lacking, either as character in the narrative or as patriarchal symbol. This suppression of the anterior generation, but in particular of the paternal sign, signals the poem's disinterest in genealogical continuation. *Guillaume* is not alone in this, however, for the verse romance in general would appear to work in a more contracted temporal space than does the epic. A romance which does feature a maternal character, but which also places considerable importance on the paternal, is *Le Conte du Graal*, or *Perceval*, by Chrétien de Troyes. As pointed out by Kullmann, '*Perceval* ist der einzige Roman, in dem, wie in den *chansons de geste*, größere Verwandtschaftskollektive eine Rolle spielen'.<sup>38</sup> Yet the depiction of kinship relations in *Perceval* does not follow the same pattern, or present the same emphases, as in the *chanson de geste*. As Kullmann argues: 'Die vertikale Linie, die vorgeführt wird, ist freilich nur kurz: Wir erfahren nichts über den Vater der drei Geschwester, und der Sohn, der die Nachfolge in der Herrschaft angetreten hat, ist offensichtlich unfähig, Kinder zu zeugen'.<sup>39</sup> The genealogical space of the poem is limited -- bound within the close world of uncles,

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<sup>38</sup> Kullmann, *Verwandschaft in epischer Dichtung*, p. 186.

<sup>39</sup> Kullmann, *Verwandschaft in epischer Dichtung*, p. 193.

nephews, and cousins, the kinship structure of *Perceval* may be complex, yet it is not temporally or vertically extensive. A further point on which the genealogical structuring of this romance may be seen to differ from that of the epic, and one which has considerable importance in the present context, is that of the opposition which it sets up between male and female characters. Kay suggests: 'the significant opposition in Chrétien's text is between male and female kin, rather than between mother's and father's kin'.<sup>40</sup> The overall divide is one of gender, yet the most significant split is between the paternal and the maternal, for the world of the father is not supported and sustained by that of the mother. Rather, the poem shows these two worlds in opposition.<sup>41</sup>

The linkage of the mother with nature, sowing and feeding (ll. 80-81) contrasts with the desolation of the Wasteland and the infertility and death of the father. As Perceval's mother tells him:

Vostre peres, si nou savez,  
 Fu par mi les anches navrez  
 Si que il mehaigna do cors.  
 Ses granz avoires, ses granz tressors,  
 Que il avoit come prodom,  
 Ala toz a perdetiom,  
 Si chaï en grant provreté.  
 Apovri et desserité  
 Et essillié furent a tort  
 Li gentil home après la mort  
 Uter Pandragon, qui rois fu  
 Et pere lo bon roi Artu.  
 Les terres furent essilliees  
 Et les povres genz avilliees,  
 Si s'en foï qui foïr pot. (ll. 407-21)

<sup>40</sup> Kay, *The 'Chansons de geste'*, p. 84, note 20. Donald Maddox provides the opposing view that the opposition is between mother's and father's kin. See Maddox, 'Specular Stories, Family Romance, and the Fictions of Courtly Culture', *Exemplaria*, 3 (1991), 299-326.

<sup>41</sup> This links with the work of Edwin Ardener and his idea of women as a 'muted group', whose sphere of experience corresponds to nature and the 'wild', while men represent culture and society. See 'Belief and the Problem of Women' (pp. 1-17), and 'The Problem Revisited' (pp. 19-27), both in Shirley Ardener (ed.), *Perceiving Women* (London: Malaby Press, 1975). Ardener, however, does not depict the two gendered worlds as existing in opposition, but as overlapping; the male world dominating the female. See also Sarah Kay, 'Investing the Wild: Women's Beliefs in the *Chansons de geste*', *Paragraph*, 13 (1990), 147-63 for the application of this theory to the *chanson de geste*.

Not only does the wounding of the father lead to impoverishment and sterility, but the death of the symbolic father, the king, brings destruction and death. Despite this marking of the chivalric world of the father as commensurate with death and the cessation of the paternal function, it is the patriarchal world which is affirmed over the fecund sphere of the mother in which Perceval has been raised. The symbolic relation to the father is here more significant than the ties of physical kinship to the mother. Bloch refers to 'Perceval's youth in the wasted margins of society' as being 'synonymous with the loss of a father that can also be equated with an ignorance of the signs of knighthood'.<sup>42</sup> This implies that Perceval's life with his mother is essentially one of waste, loss and ignorance; that the maternal sphere is one of lack and inferiority. Yet it is the alterity of the maternal discourse which is signalled by its marginality. The mother may be positioned on the borders of society, but it is the patriarchal world which is depicted as wasted and under threat. Despite this equating of the symbolic father and his world with death, it is this destructive influence which nonetheless predominates over the fecundity of the maternal world.

The opposition of the male and female spheres in *Perceval* is bound up with the separate nature of their discourses; with the use and interpretation of language. Prior to his meeting with a band of knights (ll. 98-337) Perceval is completely ignorant of the vocabulary and even the existence of chivalry. Both signifier and signified are unknown to him and he fails to recognise the knights for what they are, mistaking them firstly for devils (ll. 109-12) and then for angels (ll. 131-32), and subsequently demanding to know the names of all their items of equipment. Perceval exists at this point within the maternal context. His religious training comes from his mother, and as Maddox points out, his query to the knight, 'Fustes vos ensin nez?' (l. 276),

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<sup>42</sup> Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*, p. 203.



belongs to the maternal sphere of experience.<sup>43</sup> Perceval's acquisition of the linguistic terms which signify knighthood then marks the beginning of his transition from one world to another. Bloch sees Perceval's mother as blocking this transition:

His mother stands as the agent of interruption, since her horror of her husband's fate leads her to shield the son from knowledge of the father, who, had he lived, would, as she acknowledges, have preserved the continuity of the lineage: 'Chevaliers estre deüssiez'.<sup>44</sup>

It is not the continuity of the lineage which has, however, fallen into decay, for Perceval is the father's representative and heir, whether he is aware of it or not. It is rather the continuity of the patriarchal order which has become disrupted. The interdependent relation of Perceval's father and the social world of knighthood has been excluded from the enclosed sphere of the mother-child relationship, and the mother has taken the place of the father as teacher and mentor. The unacceptable nature of this usurping of the paternal role in the text's vision of chivalric ideology is signalled by Perceval's eagerness to take on the signs of chivalry and to enter into the sphere of the father.

Although the sphere of the mother must be rejected it is, nonetheless, her words which supply Perceval with a past and which point the way forward to his future as a knight. The telling of the story of his father's knighthood, his death, and the death of Perceval's two brothers (ll. 384-452) grounds Perceval in the context of a male lineage bound within the social frame of chivalry and death. Maddox comments, 'Above all, he finds *the trace of his father's mandate* that the son seek out the court of the king, the lawgiver and custodian of chivalric privilege'.<sup>45</sup> Yet the father's mandate does not need to be expressed in words. Just as Perceval later intuitively knows his name, rather than needing to be told, he appears already to know that his quest must be for the

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<sup>43</sup> Donald Maddox, *The Arthurian Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: Once and Future Fictions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 85.

<sup>44</sup> Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*, p. 203.

<sup>45</sup> Maddox, *The Arthurian Romances*, p. 86.

knighthood which represents the father; he asks the *chevalier* before he departs: 'Mais or me dites la novele / Do roi qui les chevaliers fait / Et do leu o il plus se trait' (ll. 326-28). In any case, Perceval's reaction to his mother's family history reveals him as incapable of reaching an understanding of her words, let alone of finding within them the trace of the father:

Li vallez entant molt petit  
A ce que sa mere li dit.  
'A mangier, fait il, me donez!  
Ne sai de coi m'araisonez,  
Mais molt iroie volantiers  
Au roi qui fait les chevaliers  
Et g'i erai cui qu'il en poïst'. (ll. 453-59)

Perceval links the mother with food and nurture, yet her words here belong to the symbolic realm of the father which he seeks to enter. Although Perceval may have begun to accumulate the signifiers of paternal discourse -- to learn the words which signify the accoutrements of the *chevalier* -- he as yet has no access to their meaning, or to the world which they represent.

Perceval's failure to comprehend the significance of the patriarchal vision of the past which his mother describes is paralleled by his equal incapacity to comprehend the instructions which she provides before he leaves home (ll. 497-558). His mother's comment 'Se il vos plaist a retenir, / Granz biens vos en porroit venir' (ll. 493-94) neglects to enforce the necessity for understanding as well as for memory. The son is still bound within the sphere of maternal experience and understanding, unable to relate her instructions to the external social sphere.<sup>46</sup> Although Perceval's mother speaks with a mother's voice and attempts to keep her son within the maternal sphere (ll. 460-73), it is significant that she is also able to relate to the symbolic world of the

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<sup>46</sup> Bloch sees these instructions as 'misinformation', which gives rise to Perceval's misreading of the world of the father (*Etymologies and Genealogies*, p. 203), but the mother does not set out to mislead. Her failure to tell of the chivalric world indicates a lack in Perceval's knowledge; it does not in itself constitute 'misinformation'.

father. She has the comprehension which Perceval lacks; her perceptions are structured through experience of the social. The mother is thus seen to be influenced, and to an extent constructed, by a dominant masculine world. If the Symbolic is structured through language, then entry into its sphere is dependant upon the acquisition of language. Although Perceval is able to speak, he is not fully integrated into the symbolic sphere for he lacks the essential vocabulary of the patriarchal order and of its referents. Even when he begins to acquire these, he fails to make the fundamental connections between signifier and signified, between sense and meaning, which would enable him to function as an integrated member of society. He may be provided with relevant terminology and instruction, yet he is unable to apply these appropriately. The mother, on the other hand, is revealed as integrated more fully into the Symbolic than is her son. She may stand on the margins of society, but the voice with which she speaks reveals her ability to access its meaning.

Perceval's break from his mother appears definitive:

Qant li vallez fu esloigniez  
 Lo giet d'une pierre menue  
 Si se retorne et voit chaüe  
 Sa mere au chef do pont arriere,  
 Et gist pasmee an tel maniere  
 Con c'ele fust chaüe morte.  
 Et sil sille de sa reorte  
 Son chaceor parmi la crope,  
 Et cil s'en va qui pas ne çope,  
 Ainz l'enporte grant aleüre  
 Parmi la grant forest obscure. (ll. 584-94)

The quest for the transcendent father has greater significance than the physical presence of the mother; her marginalisation is followed by her exclusion from the masculine concerns of the narrative altogether. Perceval's entry into the world of the father then necessitates a negation of his mother's influence. He firstly lays off the clothes which she provided for him (ll. 1555-76), and then replaces her maternal counsel by the teachings of the substitute father-figure, Gornemanz (ll. 1597-1651):

-- Or ne dites ja mes, biaux frere,  
 Que ce vost aprist vostre mere  
 Ne qu'ele vos ait ansaignié.  
 De ce mie [ne] vos blas gié  
 Se vos l'avez dir jusque ci,  
 Mais des or mes, vostre merci,  
 Vos prie que vos an chastoiez,  
 Que se vos plus lo diseiez,  
 A folie lo tanroit an. (ll. 1633-41)

Both the narrative and the patriarchal order thus work hard to counter the maternal influence, even if this, applied correctly, would have aided the process of socialisation.

This examination of the role of the mother in *Perceval* cannot take into account the full complexity of the narrative's interweaving and opposition of gendered voices. Yet it is apparent that the maternal role is not closed down and eradicated from the text altogether. Although the maternal space is circumscribed and the mother herself is confined to a stasis which contrasts with the active male sphere of the text, her significance in the patriarchal world remains ambiguous. The author's primary opposition of the maternal and paternal in terms of fecundity and sterility marks the need for the maternal to exist and ideally to have some measure of input into the wasteland of chivalric society. Yet the opposite occurs; the mother is removed from the narrative. Perceval's failure to ask the relevant questions in the Grail castle (ll. 3181-91) is a product of his favouring of Gornemanz' instruction to stay silent over his mother's instruction to speak. The mother's voice carried the correct message after all. The implication here is that a balanced society can only be achieved by an acknowledgement of the maternal, and by an integration of the two gendered worlds, since neither is able to function coherently in isolation. The situation is, however, complicated by the construction of the maternal character and the maternal voice within the patriarchal sphere. Although the mother speaks, it is not the maternal discourse, that is the discourse which relates specifically to the world of the mother, which

furnishes Perceval with the potential means of achieving his quest and the restitution of the patriarchal world. The mother's counsel of necessity echoes the precepts of the social order, the order of the father. The text's lack of closure, *Perceval* being left incomplete by its author, leaves open the question of the poem's fundamental acknowledgement of the maternal space and of its perceived significance. Yet it is the transcendental father who does appear paramount throughout the text. The focus on the linguistic signs of the masculine order, the quest for the name, and for the significance of the Grail, all lead Perceval towards the possibility of a 'reconfiguration of the anterior order'; a restitution of the temporal order of patriarchy which is reproductive and complete.<sup>47</sup> The role of the mother within this frame is unvoiced, the possibility of a reconfiguration and restitution of the maternal world which is rejected by Perceval appearing denied by the mother's exclusion from the patriarchal sphere, then by her subsequent death and definitive removal from the narrative.

#### THE MOTHER AS SAINT

The construction of the female character as sign and the emphasis on the patriarchal structuring of the text are brought together in a different type of romance, the pseudo-hagiographic text of *La Manekine*, by Philippe de Rémi.<sup>48</sup> The poem has been described as a mixture of traditional folktale, *roman d'aventure*, saint's life, and

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<sup>47</sup> Maddox, *The Arthurian Romances*, p. 116. Bloch, however, states: 'Perceval's own impossible quest for the paternal presence that will restore the integrity of lineage is, finally, doomed by the impossibility of totalizing meaning -- of a transcendence identifiable with the Grail itself' (*Etymologies and Genealogies*, p. 207). The impossibility of achieving the transcendent paternal does not, however, preclude or detract from the search for it. The unfinished nature of the poem in any case leaves its ultimate closure open to question.

<sup>48</sup> Philippe de Rémi, *La Manekine*, ed. by Irene Gnarra (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1988). Gnarra gives details of the debate over the authorship of *La Manekine*, whether it was written by Philippe de Rémi, or by his son, Philippe de Beaumanoir, jurist and author of the *Coutumes de Beauvaisis* (Introduction, pp. xv-xxi). She concludes, 'Since Philippe I was never a seneschal, I propose that his son composed *La Manekine* and that the dates of composition would have been *terminus a quo* 1270 and *terminus ad quem* 1285' (p. xviii).

didactic text; influences which work to produce a tale whose persecuted heroine triumphs over adversity through faith in God.<sup>49</sup> Joïe, daughter of the King of Hungary, is the central character of the romance, yet her role is essentially one of mediatrix between man and God. It is through her character that the secular/ religious opposition of the tale is played out and brought to its conclusion -- the restitution of a harmonious world order subordinate to the divine order. Albeit of a different type from that of Liënor in *Guillaume de Dole*, Joïe thus appears as a sign bound within the masculine vision of the text. Rather than as token of exchange between men, Joïe features as 'woman as saint'; a figure who parallels the Virgin Mary as an image of purity and a force for redemption. She is initially depicted as endowed by God with every virtue (ll. 72-78) and her devotion to the Virgin is paramount:

En la Virge Marie entente  
 Mist de servir et d'onnouer;  
 Tous les jours l'aloit aouer  
 D'orisons que ele savoit,  
 A une ymage qu'ele avoit,  
 Qui en sa sanlance ert pourtraite.  
 Ensi se deduist et affaite. (ll. 190-96)

As stated by Huguette Legros, 'La vie de Joïe est un modèle de sainteté laïque'.<sup>50</sup>

In addition to constructing a heroine who embodies the religious ideal of womanhood, *La Manekine* has also been read by Jean-Guy Gouttebrouze as projecting a particular religious ideology, that of exogamous marriage :

<sup>49</sup> Thelma Fenster, 'Joïe Mêlée de Tristouse: The Maiden with the Cut-Off Hand in Epic Adaptation', *Neophilologus*, 65 (1981), 345-57; Jean-Guy Gouttebrouze, 'Structure narrative et structure sociale: notes sur *La Manekine*', *Parenté: Les relations de parenté dans le monde médiéval: Senefiance*, 26 (Aix-en-Provence: Publications du C.U.E.R.M.A., 1989), pp. 199-213; Margaret Shepherd, *Tradition and Re-Creation in Thirteenth-Century Romance: 'La Manekine' and 'Jehan et Blonde' by Philippe de Rémi* (Amsterdam; Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1990). This intermingling of narrative influences is one which is apparent in many medieval texts. Notably the motif of the persecuted heroine restored through her religious faith appears in the *chansons de geste* *Berte as Grans Piés*, and *Parise la Duchesse*, discussed in Chapters 3 and 5.

<sup>50</sup> Huguette Legros, 'Parenté naturelle, alliance, parenté spirituelle: de l'inceste à la sainteté', in *Parenté*, pp. 509-48 (p. 538).



Ce qui forme le tissu romanesque de la *Manekine* et qui établit sa finalité, ce n'est pas une tentative de reproduction du réel, mais l'illustration, sous une forme métaphorique, par accentuation, d'un phénomène social: l'opposition de deux stratégies matrimoniales irréductibles l'une à l'autre -- l'une relevant de l'endogamie, l'autre de l'exogamie.<sup>51</sup>

Georges Duby's study, *Medieval Marriage*, indicates the tension between the two models:

This was the beginning of a decisive phase in the conflict that dominated this entire evolution, the conflict between two radically different and antagonistic models -- the lay model of marriage, created to safeguard the social order, and the ecclesiastical model, created to safeguard the divine order.<sup>52</sup>

Through its privileging of exogamous marriage the romance is therefore seen to have a potentially didactic purpose, promoting the interests of the Church against those of the contemporary aristocracy. This further emphasis on the religious in the narrative themes of *La Manekine* posits the tale as exemplum, its heroine figured in response to its ideological stance. This has considerable bearing on the depiction of Joïe as mother, for although religious and lay models of marriage laid importance on the necessity of virginity before marriage and on the need for procreation within marriage, the lay model focused primarily on virginity as a means to a genealogical end, rather than as a spiritually superior state. The value of a woman's intrinsic bodily 'wholeness' and integrity was conceived as one to be 'cashed in' as the woman was

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<sup>51</sup> Gouttebrouze, 'Notes sur la *Manekine*', in Parenté, pp. 199-213 (p. 202).

<sup>52</sup> Georges Duby, *Medieval Marriage: Two Models from Twelfth-Century France*, trans. by Elborg Forster (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 3. By the thirteenth century the inherent conflict between these two models had lessened somewhat in practice, as the ecclesiastical rulings on the indissolubility of monogamous marriage had become more firmly established. The ecclesiastical model of marriage, as regards the actual marital contract and its duration, is thus seen to have (in principle) prevailed over the lay model, in which the marriage tie could be annulled and new marital allegiances be entered into in response to general political expediency or genealogical necessity -- see Duby, pp. 17-22. In contrast, the aristocratic imperative to contract marriages within the same family, or between different branches of the family group, may not be regarded to have been particularly weakened by the contemporary restrictions on marriage and inheritance. Duby states: 'married men were not about to give up the practice of repudiating their wives, any more than that of marrying their cousins. The lines of battle were clearly drawn' (p. 21). The practice of endogamy had the great advantage of consolidating the familial wealth and restricting its passage to a limited number of family members, generally the eldest son and his legitimate offspring. Its economic function was therefore not easily displaced by the decrees of the Church.

exchanged in marriage, her function then becoming one of extending the patrilineage by providing it with legitimate heirs.<sup>53</sup> Given the predominant religious themes of the text, it is not surprising that this genealogical imperative does not figure significantly, despite the fact that Joïe enters into a socially-sanctioned marriage and does become mother to a royal male heir.

Before Joïe can accede to this state of valid marriage, she is threatened by one which is depicted as unacceptable in both religious and social terms. This is the ultimate in endogamous marriages, as the young woman is required to wed her father.<sup>54</sup> The plot which initiates the narrative is as follows: Joïe's mother, who died some years previously, gained the father's promise that he would never re-marry unless a woman could be found who greatly resembled his wife. Since a male heir is required for the kingdom, a search is instigated, but the only suitable candidate is found to be the king's own daughter, Joïe. The blame for this choice is displaced from the king himself to his barons, who urge him to undertake the marriage and who persuade the clergy to gain a special dispensation from the Pope. As the king tells Joïe:

Car par le gré et par l'otroi  
De mes barons, baron vous doing,  
Qui n'est mie de vous trop loing.  
J'euch a vostre mere en convant  
Que ja mais jour de mon vivant  
Femme après li n'espouseroie,  
Se jou son parel ne trouvoie.  
Mais el ne puet estre trouvee,  
Fors vous; n'i a mestier celee. (ll. 522-30)

The king is finally persuaded to agree to the marriage, but his daughter cuts off her left hand in order to prevent it, is condemned to death by her father and cast adrift in a boat. The suggestion of the incestuous marriage and the subsequent self-mutilation of

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<sup>53</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>54</sup> Legros points to the fact that although incest is almost entirely ignored by the *chanson de geste*, it does appear in other forms of medieval literature. See 'Parenté' naturelle' in *Parenté*, p. 509.

Joïe have been the subject of a Freudian reading by Thelma Fenster, which equates woman with phallus. As she explains:

The poem may be interpreted at a level beyond the apparent, religious level: the female central character, who is initially universalized as a child of either sex and then made into a phallic woman, is a representation of the castration anxiety expressed by the text and a representation of the phallus itself.<sup>55</sup>

In the present context this reading of woman as phallus is significant in its reduction of woman to symbol and its highlighting of the patriarchal focus of the narrative. Indeed, this is read by Fenster's as the text's primary concern and the reason for the popularity of the romance:

It would be difficult to overstate the text's emphasis on the primacy of the male child, and therefore, of the phallus. The centrality of the phallus is so much an unquestioned assumption of the poem that it must hardly have seemed surprising that the females in the text should have rivalled each other so viciously for it. Indeed, the rivalry is but further assurance of the phallus's significance.<sup>56</sup>

The emphasis on the male child perceived by Fenster is, however, only initially present, providing the excuse for the king of Hungary's search for a second wife. Significantly, this marriage and the production of the male heir are not achieved. In the case of Joïe herself, although she does provide a male heir for the king of Scotland, this is not the primary element of her story. Rather than focusing on the continuation of the patrilineage, and therefore on the imperative to produce a son, the central point of the narrative is Joïe's passage from illegitimate to legitimate marriage, from an emphasis on the physical body -- Joïe as double of the mother -- to a state of spiritual union. She functions as a means to salvation, but also for the redemption of the patriarchal order and for the restitution of the father. The concern of the text is thus bound up with the father and with the access of masculine society to a state of

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<sup>55</sup> Thelma Fenster, 'Beaumanoir's *La Manekine*: Kin D(r)ead: Incest, Doubling, and Death', *American Imago*, 39 (1982), 41-58 (p. 43).

<sup>56</sup> Fenster, 'Beaumanoir's *La Manekine*', p. 57.

grace. The phallic economy may dominate the text, yet it does not appear concerned with a female accession to the phallus, or, indeed with the woman as phallus, as argued by Fenster.<sup>57</sup> As Gayle Rubin points out:

The Oedipal-inducing information is that the mother does not possess the phallus. In other words, the crisis is precipitated by the 'castration' of the mother, by the recognition that the phallus only passes through her, but does not settle on her. The 'phallus' must pass through her, since the relationship of a male to every other male is defined through a woman. [...] If power is a male prerogative, and must be passed on, it must go through the woman-in-between.<sup>58</sup>

Joïe does not need to represent the phallus in order for it to have 'intrinsic merit', as claimed by Fenster, as this is already inscribed in the dominance of the patriarchal order, of which Joïe is a construct and a means to an end.<sup>59</sup>

The course of the narrative is presented as a journey, Joïe's physical journey, from her own country of Hungary, to Scotland, thence to Rome, symbolising a spiritual journey and moral evolution, not of Joïe's own character, but of society itself.<sup>60</sup> Each country is seen to be a microcosm, representing a stage in this moral progress and in the progression from a state of endogamous to exogamous marriage. As stated by Gouttebrouze :

La Hongrie est le lieu de l'endogamie incestueuse, l'Ecosse celui du mariage par choix, exogamique, échappant à tout contrôle familial, Rome la ville où tente de se résoudre la contradiction inhérente à ces deux types d'union.<sup>61</sup>

The end of the voyaging and culmination of the tale in the holy city of Rome underlines the religious import and didactic message of the whole romance, but most

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<sup>57</sup> The notion of a female accession to the phallus is highly questionable in psychoanalytic terms. Since the phallus is inherently male, it cannot be appropriated by the female. Freud equated child with phallus, as the woman desires a substitute for that which she can never have.

<sup>58</sup> Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women', p. 192.

<sup>59</sup> Fenster, 'Beaumanoir's *La Manekine*', p. 58.

<sup>60</sup> Thelma Fenster here draws a parallel between the Virgin Mary and Joïe, as both are portrayed as 'man's defence against sin' ('Joïe mêlée de Tristouse', p. 355).

<sup>61</sup> Gouttebrouze, 'Structure narrative et structure sociale', in *Parenté*, p. 202.

importantly in the present context, it sees the resolution of conflict and the restitution of the father, as well as emphasising the innate legitimacy of Joïe's marital choice. The beginning of the journey in Hungary marks the social and religious nadir of the tale. Its world may be bound within the context of endogamy and incest, yet it is also the place of the father, and of the patriarchal control of the family, a synthesis which signals the malfunctioning of the male homosocial system at this point. The function of woman as token of exchange becomes perverted; she does not carry the exchange value of a gift, but that of possessed wealth to be retained.<sup>62</sup> Joïe belongs to her father as an item of patrimonial value, yet as her mother's double, must also be assigned to him as the mother's replacement. Her fundamental value may therefore be seen to lie in her physical body as means for the doubled reproduction of the father.<sup>63</sup>

Joïe acknowledges the duty owed by daughter to father, revealing herself as subordinate to his will:

'Certes, sire, de vo vouloir  
Oïr, ne me doi pas doloir.  
Dites moi ce que boin vous ert,  
Car ma volontés me requiert,  
De tout quanque fille doit faire  
Pour pere, ne soie contraire.' (ll. 513-18)

The prior definition of Joïe's own internal moral righteousness, both as dutiful daughter and as religious ideal, thus underscores the fundamental illegitimacy of the father's proposal. Joïe's subsequent rejection of her father (ll. 548-72) does not mark her as subversive of the established codes of the social order, but rather signals the misappropriation of its signs by the father. Her stance is further supported by her

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<sup>62</sup> The linking of women and wealth here signals the doubling of the aristocratic desire to preserve the wealth of the patrimony through endogamous marriage.

<sup>63</sup> Woman as matrix for an essentially male reproduction is particularly emphasised in the case of Joïe, who, as her father's daughter, is obviously already his production. Marriage with her own father can thus be read as a 'recycling', and an opportunity for re-intensification of the father's own genetic model. As Legros suggests, 'La femme représente l'avenir du royaume et l'homogamie est la clause nécessaire à sa pérennité' ('Parenté naturelle', p. 518).

appeal to the external laws of the land and of God (ll. 551-56), a move which indicates the mirroring of inner and outer moral worlds and the divine validation of the social ideal. Through the rejection of the biological father, Joïe indicates her adherence to the laws of the transcendent father, here represented by God and mediated through the laws of Church and its vision of social organisation. The misdirection of the individual -- Joïe's father and the clergy who collude in the projected incestuous marriage -- threatens the stability of the social order. Rather than being menaced by the external other -- the female, or the pagan -- the male homosocial structure is destabilised from within.<sup>64</sup> It is significant that Joïe is here depicted as a moral representative of the patriarchal ideal. The individuals who make up the social body, and whose actions reveal their need for salvation, are all gendered as male.<sup>65</sup>

Joïe's function as symbol of female purity of necessity requires her to be virginal, the completeness of the body signalling its unbreached perfection. Yet Joïe's physical intactness is broken, the wholeness of her perfection destroyed. In contrast to the situation posited by *Guillaume de Dole*, this does not involve the loss, or suspected loss, of Joïe's virginity, but that of her hand. Joïe cuts this off herself in order to differentiate herself from her mother and to prevent the marriage with her father (ll. 722-29). Yet the excuse which is given stresses the breaching of the state of physical perfection:

'Sire, bien vous ai entendu;  
 Mais roïne ne doi pas estre,  
 Car je n'ai point de main senestre;  
 Et rois ne doit pas penre fame  
 Qui n'ait tous ses membres, par m'ame' (ll. 794-98)

<sup>64</sup> This contrasts with the earlier *chansons de geste*, where the threat to the social order is externalised and represented by the pagan. The threat is often interiorised by the later epics, particularly those of the *Cycle des barons révoltés*, while the romance focus on the individual can be read as narrowing the focus of the problem even further, to the consciousness of the hero himself (e.g. Yvain, of *Le Chevalier au Lion*, or Erec of *Erec et Enide*).

<sup>65</sup> Although Joïe's mother-in-law, who later conspires against her, is female, she is not rehabilitated or brought to a state of grace, but is imprisoned and dies. As female, she does not appear as an important element in the patriarchal structure.



The illicit desire of the father may be read as equating with the incestuous marriage; it is desire itself which destroys Joïe's intactness as the loss of virginity is metaphorically displaced to the loss of a hand.<sup>66</sup> Fenster considers this as manifestation of the anxiety which the text reveals over castration:

The lost member as (now) lost maidenhead is only a statement in reverse of what is 'missing' in the female: the phallus. The transferability of the phallus [...] its appearance in both father and daughter, shows further that the castration anxiety in the text comes not from one or the other character but from another voice, albeit one that identifies more closely with the daughter.<sup>67</sup>

Yet Joïe's hand does not have the transferability of the phallus, it is hers alone, and is returned to her at the close of the narrative (ll. 7567-74). The destruction of Joïe's physical completeness is not, however, sufficient explanation for the prevention of her marriage with her father, for in spite of this she makes the transition from Hungary to Scotland, to a legitimate royal marriage. The main point of the self-mutilation would then appear to be the destruction of the resemblance to the mother, which is the principal reason given by the text for the father's desire to marry Joïe (as opposed to any other) in the first place. The image of the mother is thus broken by the wrongful appropriation of Joïe by her father; the blame is laid upon him alone and it is only at the point of his repentance and confession in Rome that the hand may be restored.

The passage of Joïe from one country to another signals her transition from one system of marriage to another -- endogamy to exogamy. Although achieved through autonomous female choice, as Joïe is seen to allocate herself in marriage rather than

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<sup>66</sup> R. Howard Bloch links desire with the destruction of virginity itself: 'Since the desire of a virgin is sufficient to make her no longer a virgin, and since, according to the Patristic totalising scheme of desire, there can be no difference between the state of desiring and of being desired, a virgin is a woman who has never been desired by a man [...] since desire is engendered by, and indeed consists in, a look, a virgin, seen, is no longer a virgin' ('Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love', in *Modernité au Moyen Age: le défi du passé*, ed. by Brigitte Cazelles and Charles Méla (Geneva: Droz, 1990), pp. 289-313 (p. 301) ).

<sup>67</sup> Fenster, 'Beaumanoir's *La Manekine*', p. 51.

being endowed as gift by a father-figure, this marriage is still represented as valid and desirable, corresponding as it does to the ecclesiastical notion of free choice.<sup>68</sup> The failure of her father to give Joïe away in morally sanctioned marriage appears to have denied him the right to function further in this patriarchal role, and his influence is negated within the new context. His familial authority is replaced by that of the husband, and by the continuing emphasis on God as symbolic Father. Despite the moral evolution implied in the transition from Hungary and Scotland, the legitimate form of marriage -- exogamous -- together with Joïe herself, are still revealed as subject to threat. This again takes the form of a parent, this time the king of Scotland's mother. It is her reaction which most forcefully transmits the rejection of the unknown incomer:

Honis soit il quant prise l'a;  
 Ne qui le tenra mais pour Roi?  
 Or a il fait trop grant desroy,  
 Qui a ci prise une esgarée,  
 Une chaitive, une avolée,  
 Une femme o tout une main. (ll. 2056-61)<sup>69</sup>

Again, Joïe's physical lack is emphasised, yet this is now compounded by the loss of her name, as she refuses to give any details of her origins (ll. 1209-12; 1292-1304). She is thus named 'Manekine' by the king (l. 1340).<sup>70</sup> Joïe may here be read as presenting a perceptible threat to the established order of the world which she enters. Although her origin and her worth are recognised by narrator and audience, these are

<sup>68</sup> This autonomous choice in marriage is seen to conflict with the function of woman as token of exchange, subordinate to the father. Contrast the case of Belissant in *Ami et Amile*, where she must be given in marriage by the father in order for this to be perceived as valid, despite the fact that she has already physically 'disposed' of herself by seducing Amile (Chapter 5 below). The terms by which the king of Scotland's mother refers to Joïe, 'esgarée', 'chaitive', 'avolée', all indicate the distrust and hostility felt towards the unknown incomer.

<sup>69</sup> The main point of concern projected here, the unknown nature of the origins of the king's bride, reflects the contemporary importance of either equality between partners in aristocratic marriage, or of the superiority of the woman's lineage. The unlikelihood of the marriage of a king and a woman lacking genealogical context is later reflected through the reaction of Joïe's father (ll. 8445-52). The unreality of this disparate marriage therefore serves to heighten the impression of Joïe's intrinsic worth.

<sup>70</sup> For an account of the various possible readings of the meaning of this name see Fenster, 'Beaumanoir's *La Manekine*'.

not revealed to the other characters. The perceptible alien quality of the female incomer in exogamous marriage is here underscored by the lack of hand, name, and origin. Joïe's external difference signals the more important and potentially more threatening alterity of the foreigner as incomer, yet her innate worth is recognised in the new context of Scotland (ll. 1350-79) The celebration of the marriage of Joïe and the king on Pentecost Sunday (2077-82), then underscores its rightful nature.

Joïe's righteousness is further pointed up in her new context by the setting of the mother of the king of Scotland in opposition against her, mirroring the earlier persecution of Joïe by her father. Both of these characters are marked as innately wicked in their actions -- both attempt to have her burned to death.<sup>71</sup> Good and evil are thus polarised, with the threat which is posed to Joïe also being projected as a threat against the model of exogamous marriage which the text presents as legitimate, and against the rightful ordering of the world.<sup>72</sup> Since Joïe is depicted as protected by God, who directs her journey from country to country when Joïe is repeatedly cast adrift in an open boat, the characters who aim to destroy her are acting against His divine order. As emphasised by the narrator, referring to the king's mother:

Et tra[i]teur et traïson  
 Het Dix plus qu'autre mesproïson.  
 Et puisque Dix traïteur het,  
 Qui quanque [le] fait, voit et set. (ll. 4531-34)

Lonc tans en puet on bien autri  
 Grever et faire mout d'anui;  
 Mais quant plus en fait on des maus,  
 Plus cruelment torne sour ciaus  
 Qui ont pourcacié le malisce.  
 I[l] fait bon eschiver tel visce.  
 Cele mie ne l'eschiva;

<sup>71</sup> Joïe's father orders her to be burnt to death for frustrating his desire to marry her (ll. 818-29), while the king of Scotland's mother forges a letter ordering the burning of Joïe following the misreported birth of a monstrous child (ll. 3440-58). Fenster views this persecution of the young woman by her mother-in-law as a rivalry over the possession of the phallus (i.e. Joïe's husband) ('Beaumanoir's *La Manekine*', p. 57).

<sup>72</sup> The malicious nature of the king's mother and her persecution of her daughter-in-law is paralleled by other medieval texts, notably by the *Naissance du Chevalier au Cygne*, see Chapter 3.

In an ironic reversal of Joïe's fate, her mother-in-law arrives in a 'malvais port', rather than in the safe havens reached by Joïe when she is cast adrift and guided by the grace of God. The king punishes his mother severely for her betrayal of Joïe, she is immured in a tower where she subsequently dies. Her imprisonment marks her removal from the narrative, a move which Fenster reads as signalling Joïe's accession to adulthood, the mother-in-law being viewed as 'an ersatz for Joïe's own mother':

In the first instance Joïe's claim to the phallus was unacceptable, and her attempt to usurp her mother's place was nefarious. Now that she has terminated her inappropriate relationship to the mother and gained her independence, her claim is fitting, and the rival mother-in-law/ mother is rightly eliminated.<sup>73</sup>

Although a parallel may be drawn between Joïe and her dead mother, Joïe inscribed as her mother's double and her illegitimate replacement with the father, the reason for the text's expulsion of the two mothers would appear to be quite different. The death of Joïe's mother allows her place to be taken (albeit wrongfully) by her child. The mother in fact lives on through Joïe, and is only finally removed from the text when the resemblance between mother and daughter is destroyed. This could be seen as the point at which Joïe accedes to adulthood, except that instead of finding her individual identity, Joïe in fact loses it, the loss of her true name being the inverse parallel of Perceval's intuition of his. The king of Scotland's mother, on the other hand, functions primarily as a narrative device which serves to propel Joïe onward from Scotland to the *dénouement* of the tale in Rome. Although a figure of rivalry in the mother-son-daughter-in-law triangle, the reason for her elimination from the tale does not appear to be that Joïe has succeeded her in the familial structure, for Joïe herself is also separated from the 'father-figure' which is her husband, the king of Scotland. The mother-in-law has played out her role of persecutor, and since the focus of her

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<sup>73</sup> Fenster, 'Beaumanoir's *La Manekine*', pp. 54-55.

malice is the symbol of righteousness, she must of necessity be seen to be eradicated. Joïe may by this point have acceded to a state of legitimate marriage, yet it is only through her journey to Rome that her name and her identity may be restored. If Joïe's journey is viewed as one from childhood to adulthood (which is debatable, given that her character does not appear to evolve during the course of the narrative), it is surely only in the closing scenes of the narrative that she achieves her final persona.

A more interesting and perhaps more valid parallel may be drawn between Joïe's father and her mother-in-law, both of whom condemn her to death and who provoke the move to the subsequent sphere of experience. The text's differentiation of the two is, however, significant. As seen above, the mother-in-law is punished by imprisonment and is removed from the narrative by death before she has any chance to repent. By contrast, Joïe's father repents wholeheartedly:

Si tost comme il fu repentans,  
Qu'il ne fu semaine passans,  
Qu'il ne plourast pour le pecié  
Dont il se sent si entechié. (ll. 6711-14)

His following pilgrimage to the holy city of Rome (ll. 6750-60) then brings both tale and spiritual voyage to their point of culmination, as Joïe, her father and her husband are all united in reconciliation. As pointed out by Fenster, the path of the text is circular, Joïe's odyssey both beginning and ending with the father.<sup>74</sup> Yet the distinction must here be made between the character of the father, the patriarchal order which he may be held to represent, and the transcendent Father (God). In contrast to the mother, the father is not expendable. Like the king of Scotland's mother, Joïe's father may transgress against God, through the persecution of the heroine, but he is not removed from the narrative. Indeed, the father's incestuous desire for Joïe is a greater crime than the mother-in-law's malicious persecution, for he also transgresses

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<sup>74</sup> Fenster, 'Joïe mêlée de Tristouse', p. 350.

against the divinely-regulated social order. His subsequent rehabilitation may then be seen to have a dual focus. As patriarchal symbol, the father must be brought from his original position of a misdirected patriarchal power and authority in the enclosed world of Hungary, to repentance and re-instatement in the ecclesiastical world of Rome. In addition, Joïe's role as redeemer can only be achieved through the restoration of the validity of the father. The patriarchal order must be seen to function in accordance with the laws of God, and its harmony and balance must be seen to be restored. In the vision of suffering and redemption which the text projects the maternal presence plays no essential role. The two mothers, Joïe's and her husband's, are removed by death, and the possibility for their further significance appears foreclosed.<sup>75</sup> Likewise, although Joïe herself becomes a mother, it is not upon this extension of the patrilineage through the reproduction of the father that the narrative focus rests.<sup>76</sup> Rather than as a mother, Joïe can be read as a symbol of the social order itself. Her physical intactness is destroyed as the father transgresses against the laws (both human and divine) which govern social relations and thus the harmonious ordering of the world. Her name and significance are then suppressed in a context where it is the actions of the mother-in-law which replace and reconfigure those of the father; the patriarchal law is here displaced by the subversive action of the mother. It is only following the removal of the mother-in-law from the active sphere of the narrative, the re-union of Joïe and her husband, and the confession and repentance of the father, that the restoration of the physical and social bodies is achieved. Joïe reveals her name as she is re-united with her father (ll. 7145-54), while the subsequent vision of harmonious reconciliation (ll. 7313-96) is followed by the restoration of Joïe's hand through divine intervention.<sup>77</sup> Peace and order are then restored to the kingdoms of

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<sup>75</sup> This contrasts with the situation in *Perceval*, where the significance of the maternal role remains ultimately ambivalent.

<sup>76</sup> The text does signal the birth of further children to Joïe and her husband (ll. 8519-28). There is, however, no mention of either their names, or of their significance in life, only a reference to their piety and righteous end.



Hungary and Armenia, the king of Scotland becoming ruler of Hungary (ll. 7945-52), and, through Joïe's mother, of Armenia:

Sans signeur avoient esté  
Et maint yver et maint esté;  
Si eut entr'aus grans maltalens.  
Mais li rois ne furent pas lens  
De metre par le païs pais;  
De tous maltalens firent pais.  
De leur nouvel signeur l'amour  
Fist, de maint maltalent, l'amour. (ll. 8147-54)

The closing section of the poem functions as exemplum, exalting the piety of Joïe (ll. 8529-90). Yet despite this overwhelming emphasis on her religious significance, the character of Joïe is appreciably more than a religious symbol; her function as mediator between man and God serves to underline the perceived necessity for a coherent patriarchal order to function harmoniously under divine auspice. The romance signals the problematic nature of this masculine coherence, yet the anxiety which is introduced is closed down through the unification of the social body symbolised by the restoration of the intact physical body of Joïe. The maternal element within this figuration of her character as symbol may serve to link her more closely with the Virgin Mary as mediator and means to salvation, yet, in itself, motherhood is not an issue which is marked as important by the text.

It is not that maternal characters do not appear in romance texts, or that their depiction is invariable. As evident from the texts considered above, the formulation and function of the maternal character is open to a variety of influences, and the female character as mother, or as potential mother, can play an important role in the narrative. The focus of romance, or certainly of the texts considered here, would, however, appear to be masculine in orientation, whether this be the male homosocial bond

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<sup>77</sup> Two clerics go to the well to draw water and find a hand floating there. It is then restored by the Pope as God's representative (ll. 7397-579).

between companions, as in *Guillaume de Dole*, or the patriarchal structure of the social world, as in *Perceval* or *La Manekine*. In either case, the female/ maternal character would appear to function as symbol and as adjunct to the masculine order. Whether essentialised as token of exchange, or as mediatrix between man and God, the female character here remains a negative space to be filled in by masculine need and desire. The specifically maternal function of the female character appears either elided or unrecognised, the mother removed from the narrative as soon as her role has been played out. Even in the case of *Perceval*, where the significance of the maternal voice remains open to question, the text's emphasis on a dominant patriarchy, and the foregrounding of the significance of the father, signals the suppression of the maternal. The potential for a maternal input, and for the construction of a significant maternal character is thus one which may be signalled by texts such as *Perceval* and *La Manekine*, yet this is a potential which ultimately remains unfulfilled.

## CHAPTER 3

### PLOTTING THE MATRIX : MOTHERS IN THE *CHANSON DE GESTE*<sup>1</sup>

Of all the terms of kinship the most securely established is the name for father.

The adjective derived from *pater* is *patrius*. Here we have an adjective which refers exclusively to the world of the 'father'. There is no correlative term for the 'mother'; the word *\*matrius* does not exist.<sup>2</sup>

The concept of a vertical patrilinearity in which the son succeeds the father in a genealogical continuum which privileges this relationship above all others is, as seen in the Introduction, not one which maps easily on to the genealogical structure of the *chanson de geste*. In addition to the importance which the *chanson de geste* attaches to the relationship of nephew and maternal uncle, the narrative space which the genre allocates to the mother contrasts with the limitation of her role in the didactic treatise or in the romance.<sup>3</sup> It is the place of the mother in the structure of epic lineage which this chapter will consider, but first of all the difference between the construction of lineage in its social and literary contexts should be noted. In the social sphere, 'the stress placed not only upon the unidimensionality but upon the unidirectionality of lineage is significant [...] Paternal property is transferred only in one direction -- downward'.<sup>4</sup> This unavoidable nature of this progression along the temporal axis is indisputable. In

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<sup>1</sup> This use of the term 'matrix' is defined by *The Chambers Dictionary* as follows: 'a rectangular array of quantities or symbols; any rectangular arrangement of data in rows or columns'. In the present context it is used specifically to refer to the genealogical framework of the *chansons de geste* and to the reproductive role of characters (plotted as 'symbols' or 'data') within it.

<sup>2</sup> Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society*, pp. 169; 175.

<sup>3</sup> For the relationship between uncle and nephew, and father and son in the *chanson de geste* see Heintze, *König, Held und Sippe*, pp. 495-524.

<sup>4</sup> Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*, p. 73. Although Bloch's emphasis on the 'unidimensionality' of lineage is debatable, its unidirectionality is inevitable.

the context of the *chanson de geste* this chronological scheme operates in terms of narrative content, epic texts often being arranged in cycles which recount the deeds of successive generations (as in the Crusade Cycle, or the *Cycle de Nanteuil*). The format is here genealogical, the epic patriarch engendering a succession of similes, and chronological, the themes of the texts linked in narrative progression. In regard to the production of the tales themselves, the course is, however, often reversed, the construction of textual genealogy becoming one which is post-, rather than pre-, heroic. Genealogical narrative is open to an achronological formation as the lineage is written backwards, the epic hero engendering his own ancestors.<sup>5</sup>

In the context of this counter-genealogy the character of the founding members of an epic family line may be formulated and constructed as a foreshadowing and prefiguration of the central hero of the epic cycle. This is so in the case of the *Crusade Cycle*, where the *chansons de geste* which are positioned as chronologically earlier in narrative terms are actually later in terms of their composition.<sup>6</sup> Owing to the originally oral nature of the *chanson de geste*, the many *remaniements* and the multiple authorship of many extant texts, a strict genealogy of composition and of influence is, however, often difficult to establish. The multi-dimensionality and layering of epic narrativity and textuality is indicated by William Calin in *The Epic Quest*. He says of *Aymeri de Narbonne*:<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> 'Most extant *chansons de geste* have survived in groups known as cycles, or "gestes". The success of a song about one particular hero resulted in a number of others being written about him. A song dealing with his death could be followed by a later one describing his early life, so that his literary existence could begin with the end of his life and end with the beginning. In the same way, his ancestors could come into being after him, and those *chansons* celebrating the earliest heroes of a particular clan are often relatively late compositions, dating from the thirteenth or fourteenth century' (John Fox, *A Literary History of France: the Middle Ages* (London: Ernest Benn, 1974), p. 59).

<sup>6</sup> See the introduction to *The Old French Crusade Cycle*, Vol. 1, for details of the cycle's composition.

<sup>7</sup> See William C. Calin, *The Epic Quest: Studies in Four Old French 'Chansons de Geste'* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1966), pp. 4-5, for details of the composition of *Aymeri de Narbonne*. Calin states: 'The epic was composed in the early years of the thirteenth century by Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube' (p. 4, note 3), yet Bertrand was (presumably) the last poet to have produced a version of an already current epic tale.

In the unique poetic world of *La Chanson d'Aymeri* the hero cannot stand alone, abstracted from his illustrious model [...] The Count of Narbonne not only resembles his son but prefigures him. Every heroic act committed by Aymeri will be repeated, enhanced, fulfilled by Guillaume.<sup>8</sup>

The heroic model here referred to is that of Guillaume, son of Aymeri, yet the issue is confused by Calin's subsequent mapping of Guillaume's character on to that of Aymeri -- Aymeri's acts will be repeated by his textual heir. The issue of chronological narrative progression versus achronological prefiguration is clouded yet further by Calin's later comment:

The poet of *Aymeri de Narbonne*, who lived and worked at least one generation after the major epics of the Guillaume cycle had become part of literary heritage, naturally patterned his protagonist on Guillaume.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, the textual chronology of Guillaume and Aymeri is not so simple and clear-cut as Calin here implies. It is certainly the case that the main epics recounting the deeds of Guillaume d'Orange, Aymeri's son, were composed in the twelfth century and that Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube's version of *Aymeri de Narbonne*, to which Calin refers, was composed in the early thirteenth, yet the figuring of the character of Aymeri is not necessarily based entirely on the renown of his son. Rather than an individual composition, Bertrand's version of *Aymeri de Narbonne* is a *remaniement*. Aymeri as character predates *Aymeri* as thirteenth-century text.<sup>10</sup> The influences dictating the construction of his character in Bertrand's version of the *chanson* are therefore obscured and entwined. The relation between father and son is dialectical, each to some extent prefiguring the other in the genealogical relations of narrative and text. It is significant to note at this point that Calin also views Ermengard, wife of Aymeri, as 'a Guibourg figure [...] as much a prefiguration of the daughter-in-law as Aymeri is of the son'.<sup>11</sup> Both patriarch and matriarch appear as

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<sup>8</sup> Calin, *The Epic Quest*, p. 12.

<sup>9</sup> Calin, *The Epic Quest*, p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> The manuscript of G2, dated 1150-75, contains reference to Aymeri and to his wife, Ermengart.

<sup>11</sup> Calin, *The Epic Quest*, p. 19.

narrative constructs reflecting or foreshadowing their heroic descendants. The founding of the lineage does not therefore depend on Aymeri alone. His refusal of marriage until an alliance with Ermengard is proposed serves to validate her own personal worth in terms of the qualities which she embodies and which she brings to the establishment of the lineage.<sup>12</sup> This returns us to the point of questioning the construction and significance of the female character as a reproductive element within the context of this epic (patri)lineage.

As stated earlier, the prefiguration of the epic hero evident in the early *chansons* of the *Crusade Cycle* is an achronological formation, the character of the Chevalier au Cygne is constructed as a precursor to his grandson, Godefroi de Bouillon.<sup>13</sup> The first epic of the cycle (taken in chronological narrative order) is the late-twelfth-century *Naissance du Chevalier au Cygne*, or as it is alternatively known, the *Enfants-Cygnés*, an adaptation of a traditional myth or folktale then linked to the epic cycle.<sup>14</sup> The aim inherent in this epic reworking, that of providing a genealogical origin for the heroic Godefroi de Bouillon, leader of the First Crusade, has inspired significant thematic and structural changes to the folktale form.<sup>15</sup> The continuing synthesis of mythical

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<sup>12</sup> Calin says of Ermengard: 'she marries the hero and will devote her life to serving and honoring him, associated with but most of all contributing to his glory' (*The Epic Quest*, p. 10). This 'contribution' of Ermengard's implies her assimilation and subsuming to the requirements of the lineage, the 'glory' of Aymeri essentially being viewed in terms of that of the dynasty as a whole.

<sup>13</sup> Again, however, folktale elements are seamed through the trilogy of epics relating to the Chevalier au Cygne himself. The point of origin of epic narrativity is neither static nor unique.

<sup>14</sup> This exists in the two separate Old French forms: *Elioxe* and *Beatrix*, plus a later amalgamation of the two. Both the named versions are included in Mickel and Nelson (eds), *La Naissance du Chevalier au Cygne*. The title *Enfants-Cygnés*, attributed by Gaston Paris, acts to emphasise the individual nature of the story, which has its roots in the folktale or myth of the supernatural 'Swan-children'. For further details of these mythological connections see *La Naissance*, p. lxxxxi, and Jeanne Lods, 'L'Utilisation des thèmes mythiques dans trois versions écrites de la légende des enfants-cygnés', in *Mélanges offerts à René Crozet* (Poitiers: Société des Etudes Médiévales, 1966), pp. 809-20. The alternative title, that of *La Naissance du Chevalier au Cygne* links the epic version of the tale more emphatically with the Crusade Cycle as a whole, where it serves to provide a prelude to the life-story of the Chevalier au Cygne, ancestor of the heroic Godefroi de Bouillon.

<sup>15</sup> The main structural change in this respect is in relation to the sex of the main protagonist of the story. In the folktale the hero is the Swan-maiden and the action may be seen to centre on and to revolve around her as she rescues her six brothers from their swan-state by performing a significantly 'feminine' action such as sewing or weaving. In *Elioxe* the 'hero' may still be read as the Swan-maiden, as she is the only one of the children to retain human form throughout. She does not, however, perform any significant task, but rather remains a passive catalyst in the transformation of



and epic elements within the *chanson* then provides additional insight into the formation of progenerating character and epic historicisation. Not only has the ancestry of Godefroi de Bouillon here been extended in atemporal counter-genealogy, but the creation of a valid lineage (valid in both terms of nobility and heroism) has also subsumed elements of independently pre-existing oral tales. The effect of this is to reinforce further the authenticity of the *Naissance*. Its grounding in a tradition of pre-existing orality and the synthesis of mythical and epic character anchors the *chanson* in a temporality understood as existing ontologically prior to the following chronological sequence of epics.

The two French versions of the *Naissance* which exist in written form are referred to as either *Elioxe* or *Beatrix*, reflecting the variant names given to the mother of the Chevalier au Cygne. This eponymous naming should not be read as implying an emphasis on the female characters of each version, for the focus of both lies (to differing extents) on the Chevalier au Cygne himself, underscoring his significance as epic progenitor.<sup>16</sup> The importance of the Elioxe/ Beatrix character is nonetheless established in terms of her positioning as the key matriarchal figure, the first named ancestress of the epic lineage. It is the *Elioxe* which is probably the earlier of the two versions and which remains closer to its folktale origins, presenting the most evident synthesis of different narrative forms and emphases; this is therefore the text which will be considered here. Within *Elioxe* the character of Elioxe herself undergoes a degree of redefinition and transformation from supernatural 'fey' to twelfth-century noblewoman as she makes the transition from oral tale to literary epic. The supernatural aura of the original myth still permeates the text, however, prevailing most strongly in the initial depiction of Elioxe at the point of her meeting with King

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her brothers. In the *Beatrix* version the hero is the Chevalier au Cygne himself, the girl becoming simply one of six children transformed into swans.

<sup>16</sup> It is unclear as to when the two variant texts were first referred to by the names of the maternal characters.

Lothair. The lone hero out hunting in the forest encounters the unknown maiden beside an isolated fountain, an encounter which conforms to the narrative scheme of meeting between fey and mortal as defined by Laurence Harf-Lancner.<sup>17</sup> The literary motifs which surround the meeting signal Elixo's 'otherness' and fairy nature:

Ez vos une pucele cortoise et avenant,  
 De la grande montaigne vint illuec descendant,  
 Ne sai que sa biauté vos alaisse contant;  
 Bele estoit et bien faite et de parage grant,  
 Et son manoir avoit ens el mont la devant,  
 Et puceles laiens por faire son conmant;  
 Es cavernes del mont la ot abitement. (ll. 160-66)

The world of 'faerie' is at the same time presented as noble: Elixo is 'de parage grant' and commands a 'manoir'. Her own words to Lothair continue this framing of the otherworld in terms that emphasise her wealth and power:

Et nonporquant, amis, només moi vo parage,  
 Li miens pere fu rois et de grant vasselage,  
 .IX. cités m'a laisiés quites en iretage.  
 De .L. castels ai jo le segnorage,  
 Et quanqu'il i apent vient tot a mon servage,  
 Et voier et maieur tot rend treüage. (ll. 220-25)

In addition to the nobility of her lineage, Elixo's personal power as feudal overlord is here underscored. Although female, she has inherited her father's land and receives the feudal dues paid upon it. The layering of separate spheres of discourse is here apparent, with the supernatural 'otherness' of the folktale overlaid by twelfth-century themes and preoccupations. Elixo's feyness is repressed, subsumed by her new remodelling as epic character and her contextualisation in epic terms. Her marriage represents the prime example of exogamy, as the transfer of a woman from one lineage to another is underscored in the present context by Elixo's evident alterity: her

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<sup>17</sup> See Laurence Harf-Lancner, *Les Fées au Moyen Age: Morgane et Mélusine. La naissance des fées* (Paris: Champion, 1984), p. 113. She also points out the inclusion of the mountain in the 'espace surnaturel' in literary tradition (p. 187), although regards the overtly supernatural elements of the folktale encounter as having been erased by the medieval author of *Elixo* (p. 186).

supernatural origins. This is not, however, presented as a barrier to marriage with a king.<sup>18</sup> Her assimilation to Lothair's royal lineage and her destiny as forebear of Godefroi de Bouillon are validated by a strategy of containment which inscribes the fey character of Elíoxe within the bounds of the epic text. The transition from folktale to *chanson de geste* marks the fixing of Elíoxe in the frame of written language, a frame which contains and articulates her female character, suppressing her alterity in the masculine economy of the text.<sup>19</sup> In the tale this bounding within an epic frame is sustained by Elíoxe's own acquiescence to the demands placed upon her by the narrative and internarrative context -- marriage and the extension of the epic lineage.

In addition to the overlaying of folktale and epic elements in the structure of the tale and in the depiction of Elíoxe, a further opposition is set up between the worlds which she and Lothair represent. This takes the form of nature/ society, or feminine/ masculine, Elíoxe's territory of mountain and forest corresponding to the feminine Otherworld, which lies beyond the social world of masculinity.<sup>20</sup> It is in this world of

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<sup>18</sup> The reaction of Lothair's mother to the projected marriage of Lothair and Elíoxe may be seen to echo that of the king of Scotland's mother in *La Manekine* (Chapter 2 above), as she rejects the marriage of her son with an unknown: 'Bels fiux, que penses tu? Nel fai sifaitement! / Tu ne prendras feme ensi soudainement. / Jo te querai oisor tot al los de no gent. / Ci pres maint Anotars qui a grant tenement, / Rois est de grant puissance s'a maint rice parent (*Elíoxe*, ll. 360-64). Although endogamous marriage is not suggested here, the exaggerated strangeness or otherness of Elíoxe appears to place her beyond the bounds of acceptable marriage as far as the Dowager Queen is concerned. As in *La Manekine*, however, the character of the Queen is emphatically condemned as evil by the author and revealed as such by her own actions: Lothair's mother informs him by letter that Elíoxe has given birth to a monster; she then orders the murder of her grandchildren.

<sup>19</sup> This fundamental link between culture and language as masculine socialising or symbolic constructs appears in the anthropological work of Edwin Ardener, in that of feminist theorists, particularly Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva, as well as in Lacan's psychoanalytic theory. The power of language, in its symbolic representation as logos, allies with phallocentrism to produce 'logocentrism', the formal structure for the articulation of male experience and the ordering of the social world.

<sup>20</sup> This social/ wild, male/ female opposition corresponds to the anthropological model outlined by Ardener in 'Belief and the Problem of Women', in Ardener (ed.), *Perceiving Women*. Ardener suggests that men and women inhabit different spheres of experience, the dominant male sphere and the muted female sphere interlinking, yet not completely overlapping. That part of the female sphere not included in the male is viewed as the 'wild zone', outside the boundary of dominant male experience and culture. This concept is taken up by Sarah Kay in 'Investing the Wild', and may be seen to relate to the parallels drawn between the masculine and the symbolic in the theories of Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva. Elaine Showalter explains as follows: 'If we think of the wild zone metaphysically, or in terms of consciousness, it has no corresponding male space since all of male consciousness is within the circle of the dominant structure and thus accessible to or structured by language. In this sense, the "wild" is always imaginary; from the male point of view, it may simply be the projection

the supernatural and the wild that Elixo possesses power, and where she may challenge the authority of Lothair:

'Sire', dist la pucele, 'bien sanblés de vaillance,  
Mais ço wel jo savoir, par quele mesprisance  
Entrastes en mon bos? Ene çou enfance?  
J'en porrai, se jo woel, molt tost avoir venjance;' (ll. 192-95)

Elixo's acceptance of marriage with Lothair marks her transition from the feminine to the masculine sphere, but in the context of the text's epic motivation the transition can also be read as one from the oral to the literary, as Elixo is abstracted from her supernatural context and enters into her epic role of wife and mother. It is only at this point that Elixo is named, the shift between two worlds marking her definition by the logos. The accession to the signifying name points to the entry into textuality and, through this, into the social and the Symbolic, structured by the framing concept of language.

In the framework of text and intertext the character of Elixo is imbued with a double significance: not only will she take up a socially valued position as wife of King Lothair and mother to the heirs of the kingdom, she will also become matriarch of the line of Godefroi by giving birth to the Chevalier au Cygne. The 'mythistorical' importance of Godefroi de Bouillon, as first Latin king of Jerusalem and epic hero, places the emphasis of the narrative on the extension of the lineage. The primary empowerment of Elixo is negated on her entry into marriage, her significance now lying in her value as potential mother. As reproductive sign, Elixo's value is 'spent' to further the requirements of the lineage, a necessary function which is signalled by the character herself:

'Escoute encore, rois, si m'oras d'el parler.

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of the unconscious' ('Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness', in Elaine Showalter (ed.), *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory* (London: Virago, 1986), pp. 243-70, here p. 262).

En la premiere nuit après nostre espouser,  
 Que vauras vraiment a ma car deliter,  
 Jo te di par verté loiaument sans fauser  
 Que tu de .VII. enfans me feras encarger:  
 Li .VI. en ierent malle, et pucele al vis cler  
 Iert li sietismes enfes, ço ne puet trespasser.  
 Lasse! Moi, j'en morrai de ces enfans porter. (ll. 254-61)

The prediction of Elioxe continues in justification of this fate:

Et quels talens me prent que jo m'en doie aler  
 La u il m'estavra de tele mort pener,  
 Mais que teux destinee doit par mi moi passer?  
 Et m' estuet travellier et tel mort endurer  
 Por le linage acroistre qui ira outre mer,  
 Et qui la se fera segnor et roi clamer. (ll. 262-67)

Marriage, childbirth and death are accepted as inevitable and even desirable, prediction here operating as predication. The foreseeing of the destiny of the lineage actually signals its retrospective foundation in the context of the text's atemporal composition. 'History' is able to write itself and compose its own fiction. Elioxe is inevitably positioned as subordinate to her heroic male descendants as progeny become retroactive genitors, her character being formulated as their worthy forebear. The significance of Elioxe is thus bound within her maternal function; once this has been fulfilled she is revealed as a disposable token in the economy of the text. The feminine ideal is not only subordinate to the masculine, but is sacrificed to it, as Elioxe dies giving birth to the Chevalier au Cygne and his six siblings.

In view of the status of Godefroi de Bouillon, as leader of the First Crusade as well as first Latin king of Jerusalem, the characterisation of his ancestors is of particular importance. Although Elioxe is not allocated an extensive role in the *Naissance*, the role which she does play is significant, and the text works hard to establish her as a suitable matriarch for the lineage, despite her fairy origins. Her depiction as the feminine/ maternal ideal hinges on Elioxe's acceptance of her fate, and her self-subordination to it, her feyness proving a useful narrative device in providing her with

the pre-knowledge which underscores the extent of her sacrifice. Her character operates as maternal sign in a genealogical discourse whose focus lies on the production of the male hero, but the space which the text allocates to the mother is, nonetheless, depicted as essential.

#### THE MATRIARCHAL IDEAL

The late thirteenth-century epic *Berte as grans piés* depicts the ancestry of a family endowed with even greater literary prestige, that of Charlemagne and Roland.<sup>21</sup> In contrast to the mother of the *Naissance du Chevalier au Cygne*, Berte, daughter of the king and queen of Hungary, provides the main focus of the tale. Her character is, nonetheless, constructed in retrospective reflection of her prime genealogical position in the royal lineage. Drawing once again on folktale and myth, here in particular on the motif of the substituted fiancée, the tale first appeared as a *chanson de geste* attached to the legend of Charlemagne in the twelfth century.<sup>22</sup> It was then remodelled in the thirteenth century by Adenet le Roi, whose text commences with an authorially-voiced prologue announcing the telling of the true version of 'L'estoire de Bertain et de Pepin aussi' (l. 11). Despite this secondary and almost supplementary positioning of Pepin and the eponymous titling of the text in favour of Berte, it is with his antecedents that the *récit* itself then begins. It is evident that the opening two and a half *laisses* of *Berte* are formulated to provide a swift genealogical account of the male lineage preceding the birth of Charlemagne, the first-named member of the lineage being Charles Martel, father of Pepin.<sup>23</sup> Pepin's mother is not named, simply being

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<sup>21</sup> The edition here used is that by Albert Henry, T.L.F. (Geneva: Droz, 1982).

<sup>22</sup> See the introduction to *Berte au Grand Pied*, ed. by Louis Brandin (Paris: Boivin, 1924): 'Ainsi donc ce conte nous apparait au XIIe siècle transformé en une chanson de geste, rattachée au cycle de Charlemagne, où la reine Berte est prise comme héroïne et où on lui attribue les pitoyables aventures de la "vraie fiancée" en butte aux criminelles intrigues de son indigne rivale' (p. 7).

<sup>23</sup> The narrative here is historically accurate, Charles Martel being father of Pepin and grandfather of Charlemagne.



referred to as Charles's wife (l. 59), or Pepin's mother (l. 74).<sup>24</sup> The first section of the *chanson* also serves to ground the narrative firmly in epic mode as Pepin's heroism and nobility are forcefully established -- as a young bachelor he kills a rampaging lion -- a deed described by the author as a 'merveille' (ll. 50-79). Events are recounted at speed, as the author states:

En cesti ci matere ne vueil plus demorer,  
 Parmi la vraie estoire m'en vorrai tost aler  
 Et briement la matere et dire et deviser. (ll. 80-82)

The evident implication here is that the 'vraie estoire' which Adenet seeks to establish is that of Berte, eponymous heroine of the *chanson* as a whole. It is significant, however, that the credentials of Pepin (in regard to noble lineage and personal heroic quality) are so swiftly established, while the major part of the following *récit* is devoted to doing the same for Berte. The emphasis of Pepin's lineage lies on male reduplication and continuation, as Pepin succeeds his father: 'Conme droit hoir de France font Pepin coronner' (l. 88). *Berte* thus commences with the foregrounding of a genealogy predicated on male succession, one to which it ultimately returns with the final verses signalling the advent of Charlemagne and Roland. The *chanson de geste* is thus intrinsically bound to the reduplication of a masculinity which extends in linear temporality both before and after the nexus which is the text of *Berte*. Despite this emphasis on the male lineage, the importance of Berte herself is clearly indicated by the existence of the *chanson de geste* which recounts her story.

Anna Maria Mussens states:

Berte occupe ainsi une place d'honneur dans les récits épiques, par le privilège de la généalogie, même si son histoire n'est pas à proprement

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<sup>24</sup> Anna Maria Mussens comments: 'On doit aussi tenir compte de l'habitude de ne pas citer les noms féminins dans les généalogies quand ces personnes n'ont pas d'importance pour l'héritage' ('Berte ou le labyrinthe généalogique', *Revue des Langues Romanes*, 94 (1990), 39-59, p. 41). It is evident that in the present context it is specifically the male lineage which is held to be significant, the 'heritage' here being one of the patrilineage itself.

parler épique; elle recueille simplement des sujets et des motifs de l'amas légendaire universel.<sup>25</sup>

This perceived lack of true epic content in favour of elements drawn from the stock of legendary motif does tend to underplay the underlying epic orientation and significance of the *chanson*. Although *Berte as grans piés* does draw on a variety of legendary and 'mythistorical' motifs, its subject ties it emphatically to the *Cycle du Roi*. Berte may well occupy 'une place d'honneur' purely in view of her positioning at the earliest posited inception of Charlemagne's lineage, yet the thirteenth-century *récit* leaves little doubt that her character is drawn in order to produce an idealised image of womanhood. The onus placed on Berte by her positioning in the genealogical matrix of the lineage is reflected in the depiction of her character. From the first she is established as a dutiful daughter and worthy consort. In contrast to Elioxe in the *Naissance*, Berte's royal antecedents are known and her nobility is therefore not open to question; she is immediately accepted as future bride by Pepin when her name is suggested by Engerrans de Montcler:<sup>26</sup>

'Sire, je en sai une, par le cors saint Omer,  
Fille au roi de Hongrie, molt l'ai oï loer;  
Il n'a si bele fenme deça ne dela mer,  
Berte la debonaire, ainsi l'oï nonmer'.  
'Seignor', ce dist Pepins, 'n'i a fors dou haster,  
Car cele vueil avoir a mollier et a per'. (ll. 107-12)<sup>27</sup>

Beauty and lineage appear as the qualities which are of prime importance in signalling Berte's suitability as wife of Pepin and future mother of his heirs.<sup>28</sup> She functions here as an abstract ideal of femininity similar to that represented by Liënor in the

<sup>25</sup> Mussens, 'Berte ou le labyrinthe généalogique', p. 39.

<sup>26</sup> According to the tale of *Floire et Blanchefloire*, Berte's father, Floire, is a converted Saracen, a fact which renders his daughter's positioning as mother of Charlemagne somewhat problematic. Floire's origin is not, however, mentioned in the text of *Berte*.

<sup>27</sup> It should be noted that the 'Hongrois' are often associated with Saracens and are therefore viewed as outsiders to the epic community (c.f. Ermengart (mother of Guillaume d'Orange), who is Lombard, and Orable/ Guiborc (his wife), who is Saracen). Although this would link with the Saracen origin of Berte's father, there is no suggestion in *Berte* that her family are viewed as outsiders.

<sup>28</sup> The implicit reason for Pepin's marriage is the necessity of producing an heir, as his previous wife died childless (ll. 96-105).

romance of *Guillaume de Dole* (Chapter 2). There are, however, major differences between the depiction of this ideal in the epic and in the romance. Lineage and rank play an important role; Liënor is married by the Emperor Conrad despite her lower social status, this barrier to marriage being overcome through love, while Berte is in part defined as the ideal *by* her lineage. The feminine ideal of the romance text presents the woman as a love-object, and as a means of forming a bond between two men (Guillaume and Conrad). In the epic context there is no suggestion of either of these motifs; the relation of Berte to the masculine order of the text is as potential wife and mother. She may be exchanged between families, but rather than creating an appreciable bond between men, this places Berte firmly in a reproductive context, setting her in the same genealogical frame as Charlemagne and Roland. An important element in this positioning as future mother is Berte's virginity, but this is initially accepted as given, the narrative remaining silent on this point. Berte's chastity is, however, emphasised by both characters and narrator when it is later jeopardised by her expulsion from the enclosed world of the court. Louis Brandin views the chastity motif as a thirteenth-century addition, stating, of Adenet le Roi: 'Aux traits de douceur et de résignation, puisés à la tradition du folklore, il ajoute celui de la chasteté la plus pure'.<sup>29</sup> The importance of Berte's chastity is underscored by the casting of her character in a religious mould; she thus appears closer to the religious ideal presented by *La Manekine* than to the idealisation of woman as an object of love which appears in *Guillaume de Dole*.

Following her journey to France, marriage with Pepin, and replacement in his bed by her servant Aliste, who greatly resembles her, Berte is abandoned in the forest. The 'substituted fiancée' motif of the folktale here comes into play, yet from this point on a more evidently religious aura permeates the whole text, as both Berte and the

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<sup>29</sup> Brandin, *Berte au Grand Pied*, p. 8.

narratorial voice frequently signal her reliance on the mercy of God. The double discourse of familial and religious devotion are brought together in the idealisation of her character:

Lasse! mais ne verrai ma douce chiere mere  
Ne roi Floire mon pere, ma seror ne mon frere.  
Or soit Dieus de mon cors et de m'ame gardere! (ll. 561-63)

Berte's increasing emphasis on her relationship with God is paralleled by a continued reiteration of her emotional attachment to her family:

'Ahi! ma douce mere, tant me souliez amer,  
Et vous, biau tres douz pere, baisier et acoler;  
Ja mais ne me verrez, ce puis je bien jurer'.  
A genous et a coutes va la terre encliner.  
'Ha! sire Dieus', fait ele, 'tu te laissas cloer  
Enz en la sainte crois pour ton pueple sauver,  
Dont vous doit bien chascuns servir et honnorer.  
Qui plus a a souffrir, plus vous doit aorer,  
Car vous le pouez, sire, si bien guerredonner  
Ceaus qui ainsi le font, ce sai je sans douter  
K'en vo saint paradis les faites coronner. (ll. 1035-45)

The traits of passivity, duty and piety embodied by Berte link her with the essentialised and impotent ideal of the feminine portrayed in the *Livre des Manières*, the *Quatre Ages de l'Homme* and the *Chastoiement des Dames*, as well as with the image of woman as religious sign which appears in *La Manekine*.<sup>30</sup> Berte's character, however, gains a further, more human dimension through the depiction of her love for her parents. This is an element which prevents her character from being read purely as a reproductive or religious sign, as well as functioning as a narrative device which prepares the way for the subsequent recognition and reuniting of the family. The connection between didacticism and literary character construction is significant in that it serves to point up the perceived importance of establishing Berte as an ideal. The qualities which are ascribed to her reinforce her positioning in the genealogical matrix

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<sup>30</sup> See Chapters 1 and 2.

of the text, even though in the context of the narrative Berte has been displaced from this position by Aliste, who takes her place as 'wife' of Pepin.

The motif of virginity is significant in that it establishes Berte's validity as future mother of the prestigious lineage, but it also functions as an intrinsic element in the religious ethos of the text. Berte's character can be read as a type of *ancilla Dei*, her status as future mother of Charlemagne drawing distinct analogies with an implicit Virgin Mary topos. Although Berte is married in royal ceremony to Pepin (ll. 271-84), the marriage is never consummated and she remains virgin throughout her nine-and-a-half-year exile in the forest.<sup>31</sup> Her chastity, her sealed body, signals the potential for a reproduction which is as yet unfulfilled, its validity conferred and confirmed by the retrospective framing of the text. The genealogical and religious importance of virginity are allied in the potential maternity of the closed female body. The two spheres of discourse, the secular and the religious, do not, however, work in complete harmony. Although Berte is marked definitively as wife and queen to Pepin this is a marriage which is displaced by Berte herself, from the secular to the religious context:

'Ahi! mere', fait ele, 'com ariez cuer mari,  
Se vous saviez comment la serve m'a traï!  
Vous m'avez mariée a un riche mari,  
Car je suis mariée a Dieu qui ne menti:  
C'est li rois souverains a cui dou tout m'afi; (ll. 1438-42)

The religious nature of Berte's portrayal is once again underscored, but this emphasis on her relationship with God in terms which effectively replace the marriage with Pepin with a spiritual marriage verges on the subversive. Berte's identity is constructed throughout the narrative in terms of her relation to Pepin and to her future

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<sup>31</sup> Eventually, after lengthy wanderings in the forest, Berte is sheltered by a peasant family with whom she stays for nine and a half years (ll. 1187-235; ll. 1426-27). The element of non-consummation immediately raises the question of the actual legitimacy of the marriage in terms of thirteenth-century law, yet this is never brought into doubt by author or characters.

offspring (her evident bond with her parents serves rather to stress Berte's prior identity -- that which validates her present inscription as wife of Pepin).<sup>32</sup> A negation or denial of marriage with Pepin would ultimately serve to negate Berte's narrative and intertextual significance. This effacing of an identity predicated on reproductive codification does, however, take place to a certain extent within the narrative. Again, it is Berte herself who is instigator of this self-denial and muting of identity. Although her position within the narrative framework of kinship relations is acknowledged, this is only to signal its imminent suppression. In the words of her vow to God:

Je vueil pour vostre amour ici endroit vouer  
 Un veu que je tenrai a tous jours sans fausser,  
 Que ja mais ne dirai, tant com porrai durer,  
 Que soie fille a roi ne k'a Pepin le ber  
 Soie fenme espousee, ja mais n'en quier parler,  
 -- G'iroie ains d'uis en huis mes ausmosnes rouver --  
 Se ce n'est par un point, celui en vueil oster:  
 Je le diroie avant, pour me faire douter,  
 Que dou cors me laissasse honnir ne vergonder;  
 Ma virginité vueil, se Dieu plaist, bien garder,  
 Car qui pert pucelage, ce est sans recouvrer. (ll. 1049-59)

Berte's desire to preserve her virginity is framed in religious terms, its possible loss entailing personal shame and dishonour instead of relating to the wider social context of lineage. Her relationship at this point is with God, rather than with Pepin, and the preservation of the sealed body appears important in a religious, rather than a secular, context. Berte's vow is sworn 'for the love of God' and in the context of God's protection. Paradoxically, however, the holy vow may only be broken at the threat of the loss of virginity. Rather than projecting a cohesive and monolithic statement (as in the case of nuns vowing chastity), the relation between vow and virginity is thus split, becoming dialectical and ambiguous, for Berte will equally lose and preserve a measure of sanctity whether she keeps or breaks her word. The nature of Berte's

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<sup>32</sup> The author frequently refers to Berte as 'la roïne Berte' during her exile (cf. ll. 882; 885; 915; 980. This has the literary effect of heightening the disparity between Berte's royal status and her impoverished circumstances, yet it also signals her continual and essential linkage with Pepin.



relationship with God is thus destabilised, opened up to a potential secular influence which threatens either to breach the intact body, or to break Berte's vow to God.

The marking of Berte's identity in terms of her nobility disappears from the *chanson de geste* with the suppression of her name, her character then appears contained by the pure spirituality of a virgin bride of Christ. Her devotion is rewarded by God's protection, firstly as two thieves attempt to rape her in the forest -- this is preceded by her calling upon God and followed by prayers to the Virgin Mary (ll. 931-78). Her subsequent rescue from a savage bear is also attributed to divine intervention:

'Aïde Dieus', fait ele, 'qui fist la mer salee;  
Pere de paradis, or est ma vie outree!  
De la paour qu'ele ot est cheüe pasmee,  
Et l'ourse s'en depart, autre voie est tornee;  
Molt tost eüst Bertain mengie et estranglee,  
Mais Dieus la garanti et sa mere honnoree,  
Ne lor plot k'ainsi fust Berte a sa fin alee. (ll. 1152-58)

The marking of the bear as female (ll. 1151; 1155; 1162), lends symbolic weight to the episode -- God will not allow Berte, as future mother of the imperial line, to be overcome by female inferiors, analogy being drawn between the carnivorous nature of the bear and the destructive, animal nature of Aliste and her mother, Margiste. The attack on Berte by thieves/ rapists may equally be read as paralleling the depiction of Berte's male servant, who complies with Margiste's treachery. Noble lineage and the sanctioning hand of God raise Berte above all such threats posed by her social and moral inferiors. The use of hagiographic topoi is sustained by the interactive nature of Berte's relation with Heaven, validating her piety and self-abnegation. Through her spiritual marriage, Berte is placed outside the temporal matrix into which her epic destiny would initially appear to inscribe her. The potential subversion inherent in the denial of her crucial positioning in the genealogical frame is not, however, allowed to come to fruition. Berte's positioning as copula in the internarrative matrix of epic

lineage may be silent, as her identity is silenced, but it is yet undeniable. Her presence at the initial juncture of the lineage is still imperative in narrative and intertextual terms.

Berte's pre-destined function as mother of Charlemagne and grandmother of Roland is signalled early in the text:

Sachiez que n'i ot gaires ne joie ne deduit  
La roïne qui puis porta le noble fruit  
De quoi maint Sarrazin furent mort et destruit. (ll. 914-16)

Yet it is only at the meeting of Berte and Pepin in the forest, following the unmasking of Aliste, Berte's substitute at Pepin's court, that Berte's predicted epic significance would appear to take precedence over her sanctification. The king is hunting alone when he encounters Berte (ll. 2656-59), whose beauty recalls, yet surpasses, that of his 'wife', Aliste. His immediate desire is to take her with him and make her his mistress. It is at this point that Berte's vow of silence in regard to her identity is broken:

'Sire', fait ele au roy, 'je vous vueil conmander,  
El non a cel seignor qui se laissa pener  
Enz en la sainte crois pour son pueple sauver,  
K'a la fenme Pepin ne puissiez adeser:  
Fille sui le roy Floiree, de ce n'estuet douter,  
Et fille Blancheflour, que Dieus puist honnorer'. (ll. 2729-34)

Significantly, although Berte initially appeals to Pepin's piety, she then immediately reveals her royal connections. God's intervention is not, in this instance, expected, nor does it occur. Religious discourse is here surpassed and displaced by a return to that of the epic, as Berte's identity is regrounded in terms of her epic function as wife of Pepin.

The appreciable shift from religious to epic discourse does not necessarily imply a replacement of the one by the other. The two operate in dialogic relation throughout

the *chanson*, the religious predominating until the above meeting between Berte and Pepin. At this point the relation alters. The epic discourse, operating until now as underlying counternarrative, becomes dominant, yet the religious structuring and implication behind the hitherto hagiographic construction of Berte's character is still in force. Berte's vow to conceal her identity may be broken, but the 'get-out clause' provided by the threat posed to her virginity means that her spiritual worth is not, in fact, negated. The characterisation of Berte in terms which emphasised her spirituality has served to affirm her intrinsic quality and worth. Owing to her faith and piety, she has been protected until now by divine guidance and intervention. The fact that God does not intervene at the meeting of Berte and Pepin in the forest then appears an explicit acknowledgement of the inherent rightness of the encounter and of Berte's revelation of her identity. The revelation itself does in fact work to protect Berte in this instance, as was its intention.<sup>33</sup> Her desire to retain a state of corporeal intactness may signal Berte's innate spiritual nature and her self-perception as Bride of God (l. 1441), yet God's protection of her has been maintained in order to preserve her for this particular moment, for her re-inscription into the prime discourse of the text, that of epic genealogy. The desire and motivation of epic textuality and religious discourse may now be read as concurring and as mutually reinforcing. Berte's destiny as mother of Charlemagne is signalled by the author and the epic text, but is lifted beyond the epic context to be ultimately sanctioned by the word of God. Charlemagne's elevation as a 'mythistorical' figure in twelfth and thirteenth-century literature exists in symbiotic relation with his religious significance, as supreme Christian king and warrior against the infidel. God's sanctioning of his birth through the medium of Berte thus privileges the mother-son dyad and underscores the implicit Mary-Jesus analogy. Berte is thus endowed with an air of sanctification. The narrative transposition from a dominant religious to a dominant epic discourse and the context in

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<sup>33</sup> It is doubtful, however, whether this revelation of identity would realistically have worked as a deterrent in other circumstances. It is significant that on the first threat to Berte's virginity, the attack by the two thieves (ll. 941-51), the narrative does not require the breaking of the vow.

which the vow of concealment is broken do, however, signal the imminent loss of a primary constituent of this hagiographic portrayal -- Berte's virginity. The image of the sealed and saintly body is now replaced by that of the reproductive body as hero and textuality are engendered together.

Berte's role as matriarch of a heroic family is speedily commenced once she is reunited with Pepin; Gille, the mother of Roland, is conceived within the first three days, to be later followed by Charlemagne (ll. 3170-73). Berte's spiritual and physical value, earlier essentialised in her virginity, is now spent in the formation of the lineage. This provides an example of a case where the linear family model and the father-son succession perceived by Bloch cannot be mapped onto the epic text.<sup>34</sup> Firstly, the primary focus of the text lies upon Berte herself as mother of Charlemagne, rather than upon Pepin as his father. Secondly, the heroic line which is begun by the birth of Charlemagne does not display a patrilinear continuity, for Roland, arguably Charlemagne's heroic successor, does not follow him as legitimate son.<sup>35</sup> The characters who act as foreshadowing and prefiguration of Charlemagne and Roland in the narrative of *Berte*, Berte, Pepin, Floire and Blancheflour (Berte's parents), equally do not constitute a patrilineage. They are not presented as the heroic members of a lineage, but as its forebears, formulated as precursive elements to the text which their descendants will write. This projection into a future as yet unwritten (in the context of the particular narrative temporality of *Berte*) is forcefully indicated in the final lines of the *chanson*:

Li premiers des enfans, de ce ne doutez mie,  
Que Pepins ot de Berte, la blonde, l'eschevie,  
Orent il une fille, sage et bien ensaignie,  
Fenme Milon d'Aiglent, molt ot grant seignorie,  
Et fu mere Rollant qui fu sans couardie,  
Ains fu preus et hardis, plains de chevalerie.

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<sup>34</sup> See the Introduction.

<sup>35</sup> Roland is, however, viewed by Heintze as being Charlemagne's illegitimate son. See *König, Held und Sippe*, p. 448.

Aprés ot Charlemaine a la chiere hardie,  
 Qui puis fist seur paiens mainte grant envaie.  
 Par lui fu mainte terre de paiens essillie,  
 Maint hiaume decoupé, mainte targe percie,  
 Maint hauberc derrompu, mainte teste trenchie;  
 Molt guerroia de cuer sor la gent paiennie,  
 Si k'encore s'en duelent cil de cele lignie. (ll. 3473-86)

The narrative thus presents no closure. The religious discourse of *Berte* is pressed into counternarrative by the epic significance of the final scenes of the *chanson*, but this retrospective prediction of a future narrativity again signals the importance of religious theme and topos in the *chanson de geste*.

The significance of Berte and of her positioning in the genealogical matrix of Charlemagne's lineage is firstly signalled by the existence of the text of *Berte* itself. Secondly, the religious and social validation of Berte (as opposed to all others) as the means by which the heroic line will be produced is strongly voiced within the text. She is not the only woman who is placed by the narrative in a position to act as genitrix of an epic lineage by bearing Pepin's children. He is married to an unnamed first wife soon after becoming king, yet: 'Onques de cele fenme ne pot hoir engendrer, / Car il ne plot a Dieu qui tout a a garder' (ll. 96-97). Evidently suitable in social terms, this woman (of whom we are told virtually nothing, and who subsequently dies) is not worthy in the eyes of God to serve as forbear of Charlemagne and Roland. The contrast with the later religious exaltation of Berte is crucial, emphasising her validity yet further. Even with the marriage of Pepin to Berte, however, the lineage cannot immediately be extended in valid form. Berte's displacement by her servant, Aliste, effectively inscribes Aliste into Berte's destined role in the reproductive matrix of text and society. Wife to Pepin in all but the marriage ceremony, Aliste bears him two sons. The character of these two children is, however, striking in its initial and continuous marking as deviant:

Cele nuit fist li rois toute sa volonté

De la tres fausse serve, plaine de mauvaisté;  
 Un hoir i engendra, par fine verité,  
 Qui Rainfrois ot a non, n'ot gaires de bonté;  
 Puis en ot il un autre, Heudri l'ont apelé;  
 Plain furent de malice et de grant fausseté. (ll. 404-09)

Rainfrois is designated the heir, marked as such in the bounded context of the court by the laws of primogeniture and by the narrative's veiling of his true identity in terms of his matrilinear descent. His innate qualities do not, however, befit him to fulfil this role, either within the confines of the textual structure or in the external frame of epic lineage. This is immediately and intuitively recognised by the boys' grandmother as Pepin introduces his sons to Blancheflour with the words: 'Cil doi sont mi enfant de vo fille ma drue' (l. 1931). Palpably not of her blood and lineage, Blancheflour has no emotional response to the sight of the children:

Blancheflour la roïne, ou molt ot de bonté,  
 Regarda les enfans qui sont de joene aé;  
 Ele n'en a nesun baisié ne acolé,  
 Car li cuers ne l'i trait, ce sachiez par verté. (ll. 1936-39)<sup>36</sup>

The birth of these two children has not been prevented by God (as with Pepin's first wife), yet their lack of correspondence to any kind of ideal is supremely evident. As prospective inheritors of the name of the father and of the patrilineage the two boys are unsuitable, as illegitimate. In regard to the personal qualities which they display they are again marked as inherently lacking, for these reveal them as heirs to the treachery and wickedness of Aliste's lineage. Their existence may therefore be read as tolerated by the text precisely because they are, in themselves, invalid, in both legal and moral terms. The text manifests no fear that Aliste's children could ultimately usurp the place of Berte's in the future dynasty. Its concern to construct an idealised ancestry

<sup>36</sup> Blancheflour's intuitive recognition of the untruth behind Pepin's words finds echo in her later reaction to Aliste, when the latter is presented to her as her ailing daughter: ' "Aÿde Dieus", fait ele, "qui onques ne menti! / Ce n'est mie ma fille que j'ai trouvee ci; / Se fust demie morte, par le cors saint Remi, / M'eüst ele baisie assez et conjoy" ' (ll. 2127-30). The evident alterity of Aliste and her children is indicated by Blancheflour's innate goodness (l. 1936) and love for her daughter in contrast to the significant lack of these qualities ascribed to Aliste and her offspring.



for Charlemagne and to signal his advent precludes the inscription into the lineage of genealogical elements which are anything less than perfect. The children of Aliste do, nonetheless, have the narrative function of providing a voiced counterpoint to those of Berte. Their social and moral illegitimacy contrasts with the supremacy of Berte's descendants, thus heightening the value of Berte herself when compared to Aliste. Even as future projection, the value of Berte's offspring is markedly greater in both epic and religious terms than that of Pepin's firstborn sons, whose lack of genealogical validity is signalled not only by their illegitimacy in law, but by their illegitimacy as heirs to the epic lineage.

The fact that Pepin and Aliste are not legally joined in marriage is not sufficient explanation for their sons' innate lack of worth.<sup>37</sup> Just as the boys are marked from the beginning as corrupt and malicious, so too is their mother. The first mention of Aliste carries the following authorial prediction: 'C'ert la fille la serve, ses cors soit li honnis, / Car puis furent par li maint grant malice empris' (ll. 159-60). From this point on Aliste is referred to as 'la tres fausse serve' (l. 405), Aliste 'cui li cors Dieu maudie' (l. 1458), and 'la mal serve' (l. 1561). Such epithets signal her innate lack of personal worth and integrity, her lack of religious justification and her lowly social position. The contrast with Berte could not be clearer. This narrative counterpositioning of the two women serves to heighten the disparity between them, yet, given the hagiographic tone of the central section of the *chanson*, it has further implications. The quasi-Marian status of Berte has already been posited, owing to her spirituality and her situating at the nexus of sanctified and heroic reproduction. If Berte is allied to the spirit, then Aliste is to the flesh, representing the perceived carnality of women. She goes willingly to Pepin's bed, while plotting to destroy

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<sup>37</sup> For literary examples of illegitimate offspring who nonetheless embody noble qualities see Berkvam, *Enfance et maternité*, pp. 110-13. The most notable of these is perhaps Bernier, of *Raoul de Cambrai*. The problems relating to legitimacy and illegitimacy in *Raoul* will be considered in Chapter 4.

Berte (ll. 350-60; ll. 379-88) and once established as queen her influence over Pepin is one of unmitigated lust:

Grant avoir assamblèrent -- Dieus les puist maleir!  
Car li rois les laissoit de trestout couvenir,  
K'en la serve avoit mis cuer et cors et desir.  
Qui bien la regardast a droit et a loisir,  
Bien desist que plus bele ne peüst on choisir;  
Mais tant estoit mauvaïse que Dieu nes obeïr  
Ne vouloit n'au moustier ne aler ne venir. (ll. 1544-50)<sup>38</sup>

Aliste's lust for wealth and power is sustained by Pepin's enrapture. His heart and body should belong to his wife, yet this religiously sanctioned investment in marriage is here displaced, just as Berte herself has been displaced. The deviance of the pseudo-marriage with Aliste is explicitly signalled by the addition of 'desir' to the rightful investment of 'cuer et cors' (l. 1546), as the valid and 'natural' bonds of marriage are tainted and compounded by a desire which signifies the added element of sin and adultery.<sup>39</sup> Pepin's desire for Aliste mirrors her desire for his kingdom, both forms of covetousness thus being bound within the sphere of the physical. This grounding of both Aliste and Pepin within a definite physicality would not appear to redound to the latter's credit, or to fit easily with his epic status, yet if Aliste is viewed as analogous to Eve (here opposed to the Virgin Mary/ Berte linkage), her seduction of Pepin carries overtones which place his character implicitly in analogous relation to Adam, implying inevitable and unavoidable seduction.

The misogynistic topos of feminine beauty concealing innate wickedness functions throughout the text in relation to the depiction of Aliste. Her beauty is as that of Berte:

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<sup>38</sup> Aliste's explicit rejection of God also places her as significant counterpoint to Berte.

<sup>39</sup> As far as Pepin is aware, Aliste is indeed his legitimate wife, so his desire for her is not perceived by him as wrongful. It is made abundantly clear in the narrative context that Aliste's wickedness far surpasses any measure of culpability which may be ascribed to Pepin. She is the cause of his infatuation, his fault being one of understandable compliance in the face of her 'feminine' traits of wiliness, deception and seduction. The epic valuation of Pepin in terms of his genealogical significance is, in any case, sufficient to guard him against any personal taint caused by his failing to recognise the evil of Aliste and his complicity with her actions.

Mieus ressamble Bertain que ne paindroit paigniere,  
 N'ert fenme qui a eles de grant biauté s'afiere  
 Nient plus c'uns pres floris samble gaste bruiere. (ll. 345-47)

Yet the epithetic marking of her character and her own later behaviour work to belie this apparent similarity: 'Forment se fist la serve et douter et cremir, / Tant fist que molt forment se fist partout haïr' (ll. 1534-35). The final revelation of the deception practised by Aliste and her kin brings about her entry into a nunnery, yet this does little to mitigate the impression of the inherent wickedness of her character. There is no indication, either from author or text, that this move entails any sense of repentance on the part of Aliste. She praises God that her life has been spared (l. 2326), yet the justification which she offers for her entry into the nunnery is decidedly secular: 'bien sai lire et chanter' (l. 2331). The only redeeming element in the depiction of Aliste's character is that the driving force behind her actions is clearly shown to be her mother, Margiste. The evil characteristics of the mother would appear to have been inherited by the daughter, who then in turn passes them on to her own children.<sup>40</sup>

In their Eve/ Mary, carnal/ spiritual opposition Aliste is the inverse reflection of Berte, a duality marked by the differing nature of their marriages -- the one illegitimate, yet bound by physical union, the other legitimate, yet originally unconsummated. Both the form and character of marriage act as implicit comment on the nature of the two women. Body and spirit are here brought into a dialectic, with Pepin as husband remaining as mediating constant. Likewise, the nature of the children produced within this opposition of traits may be read not as dependant upon the form of marriage itself (illegitimate/ legitimate), but as ultimately dependant on the maternal character which produces them. It is significant that Aliste's lineage (read both as ascending and as descending) shares her traits of duplicity and malice, while both the parents and

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<sup>40</sup> This inheritance of character traits corresponds both to contemporary natural scientific belief (see the Introduction), and to the characterisation of a whole lineage as either heroic or as treacherous in the context of the *chanson de geste*.

offspring of Berte are as noble in character as she. Character and lineage are here inseparable. Like produces like within a matrix of constant reduplication.<sup>41</sup>

#### SYMBOLIC FORM AND NARRATIVE FUNCTION

In the context of the *chanson de geste* the chain of male succession, as referred to by Bloch, can act as a form of textual interlinking. It appears, for example, in the *Cycle des barons révoltés*, or the Crusade Cycle, yet the emphasis which the genre would appear to place on the mother as integral element in this heroic reproduction marks her significance in its genealogical structure.<sup>42</sup> Despite the emphasis placed upon the reduplication of the male hero in the early texts of the Crusade Cycle, the *Naissance du Chevalier au Cygne*, the *Chevalier au Cygne*, and *La Fin d'Elias* (early in terms of narrative chronology), the space which these texts allocate to the maternal character is

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<sup>41</sup> Berkvam's study of *Enfance et maternité* agrees to an extent on this point: 'Le déterminisme que provoque la notion de lignage peut nous paraître particulièrement restrictif. Qu'une serve se fasse passer pour noble, qu'un descendant de Ganelon ne soit pas traître, voilà qui est impossible' (p. 19). On this point, however, Berkvam would appear to conflate the categories of social position and genealogical inheritance. Social caste and lineage are evidently inter-related, Aliste comes from a lineage of servants and is thus bound within a servile context, yet a lineage (whether noble or otherwise) may carry a particular form of textual marking -- positive or negative, as in the case of the family of Ganelon. Berkvam would, however, hold that Aliste's evil nature is an aspect of her usurping of a higher social position: 'Au début du récit, Aliste et sa mère sont des serves, mais des servantes en qui l'on a confiance. Du jour où Aliste usurpe la place de Berte aux côtés du roi Pépin, sa bassesse resurgit [...] Aliste n'aurait pu être bonne qu'à l'intérieur de sa caste, en restant fidèle et obéissante à sa maîtresse. En tant que reine, il lui est impossible de réussir sa vie' (pp. 18-19). The analogy drawn between the lineage of Ganelon and the lack of social mobility of Aliste is evidently based on a redundant premise, and as such does not accurately illustrate the point which Berkvam is trying to make. In the case of *Berte* it is not a question of character altering as social position alters, rather individual character and inherited lineage are intrinsically interdependent, the one constituent of the other. Qualities of a lineage (whether noble or peasant) are essential to that lineage, rather than to the context in which its representative may be found.

<sup>42</sup> There are, however, many opposing examples, perhaps the most significant here being that of the *Cycle de Guillaume d'Orange*. This differing structural emphasis could be linked with the work of Heintze and Benveniste, the earlier *chansons de geste*, such as those relating to Guillaume, reflecting the earlier cognatic form of kin-structure. The composition of the first *chansons* of the Crusade Cycle (in terms of their narrative chronology) was certainly later than those which follow them in the narrative Cycle. The content of the *Cycle des barons révoltés* would also appear to indicate a later date of composition than that of the Guillaume Cycle. (On this point see Heintze, *König, Held und Sippe*: 'Ab der Mitte des 12. Jahrhunderts wird die epische Welt in immer stärkerem Maße von inneren Konflikten erschüttert' (p. 207), and Kay, *The 'Chansons de geste'*, Chap. 6). The patrilinearity of the later cycles would then be explained by the development of the agnatic kin-structure.

important, as the mother acts as conduit for the male lineage. In the case of the Crusade Cycle the matriarch of the lineage is Elioxe/ Beatrix, as seen above, but the significance of the female character as mother appears again as link between the Chevalier au Cygne and Godefroi de Bouillon. Ida, daughter of the Chevalier and mother of Godefroi, is inscribed into the space between the two male heroes, her value in genealogical terms heightened by her positioning as nexus. Although Ida's value as reproductive sign is ascribed to her through her relationship with father and with son, this crucial positioning necessitates her narrative depiction as the ideal woman.<sup>43</sup>

In the case of the epic texts considered above, *Elixe* and *Berte as grans piés*, it is evident that the narrative formulation and depiction of the mother's character reflects her positioning in the genealogical structure. It may well be argued, in the case of these two texts, that the bride (as future mother) is inscribed into the text as a set of ideal characteristics, as a sign which represents her reproductive value, rather than being portrayed as a character. The short duration of Elioxe's role in the *Naissance*, despite her maternal/ matriarchal significance, lends weight to this theory. Established as suitable in terms of the requirements of the male lineage, she may be written out of the narrative once her role has been fulfilled. Even in the case of Berte, whose role extends throughout the *récit*, author and text work to produce a character who embodies a particular set of referential values appropriate to the continuation of the lineage.

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<sup>43</sup> See *The Old French Crusade Cycle*: vol. 2, *Le Chevalier au Cygne* and *La Fin d'Elias*. It is significant in terms of the continuation of the male blood-line that the Chevalier au Cygne does not leave any male heir, but only a daughter, Ida, who will become mother to Godefroi de Bouillon. Laurence Harf-Lancner posits the following explanation: 'Le chevalier au cygne est inséparable d'une figure héroïque, celle du premier avoué de Jerusalem. Celle-ci ne doit pas être éclipsée par celle d'un fils de l'homme fée. Godefroi sera donc le premier descendant mâle du chevalier au cygne' (*Les Fées au Moyen Age*, p. 184). Alternatively, the Ida-Godefroi, mother-son relationship may be read as reflecting that of Mary and Jesus, particularly owing to the significant Christian connection with the ruling of Jerusalem.

In *Berte as grans piés*, the constant factor in the two reproductive 'marriages' of Pepin is the king himself, yet, as considered above, the children produced by these two relationships are markedly different, their nature and character apparently relating specifically to the innate value of the mother as reproductive sign. Although a means to a specific end, that of duplicating the masculine, the mother herself does not therefore simply act as a conduit. She is defined and marked as either positive or negative in the reduplicative context, a symbolic marking which can then be transmitted to the children subsequently produced.<sup>44</sup> Despite its assimilation to the masculine, the signifying value of the feminine is not negated. The woman as maternal sign may be mute and sublimated, yet her position as nexus is integral to the functioning of the reproductive matrix. The weight and importance of genealogy and lineage in the *chanson de geste* does not work to suppress the female presence within its narrative or intertextual context. It rather provides her with a space and a symbolic significance which open up the possibility for a greater maternal input both to the epic lineage and to the narrative itself.

The representation of the mother as reproductive sign cannot be divorced from her depiction as character, for the inter-relation of the two in the narrative context is a fundamental aspect of the playing out of the maternal role in the masculine frame of the text. The feminine/ maternal role is of necessity subject to the constraints of the symbolic order in which the role is conceived; the woman is 'spoken' by the masculine discourse of the text. The maternal paradox is that the mother appears simultaneously as both sign and character, a synthesis which reflects Lévi-Strauss' analogy of woman as a sign with an inherent value, yet which extends the depiction of

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<sup>44</sup> This corresponds to the twelfth and thirteenth-century belief that the mother did have influence over the development of the child in the womb. Her temperament, disposition and personal characteristics were of particular relevance in this respect. For further details see the Introduction. This type of inheritance from the mother does not invariably appear in literary texts, however, the mother-child relationship appearing open to a wider range of influences. See Chapter 5 for the counter-example of *Ami et Amile*.



the mother beyond this restrictive formula, a concept also indicated by Lévi-Strauss. The balance which a text sets up between these forms of maternal depiction, inscription as sign or referent, and portrayal as active character, is, however, open to considerable variation. The characters considered so far in terms of their maternal significance, Elioxe and Berte, differ greatly in regard to the extent of their role in the narrative, although the depiction of their characters would appear to reflect a similar ideological formulation. Both women appear as passive constructs, reflecting the feminine/ maternal ideal of contemporary masculine discourse. Within the narrative their apparent lack of autonomy and of any real participation in the action does tend to inscribe them as abstract representations of a femininity which functions as subservient to the masculine desire of the lineage. Their value is invoked through a vision of idealised womanhood and maternity. This representation of female character as an abstract and idealised image of femininity could be read as approximating to that of women in the romance, constructed in response to, and as reflection of, masculine desire.<sup>45</sup> Yet neither the image, nor its purpose, are the same in the two genres. Although the structuring frame of the *chanson de geste* can be regarded as product of a masculine symbolic discourse, the imperative which this brings to the text does not parallel the masculine desire of the romance. The representation of the mother in the *chanson de geste* is irreducible to a pattern of monologue and stasis, paradoxically in spite of, and because of, her reproductive significance. The acknowledgement of this significance in the context of the *chanson de geste* opens up a space for the mother in the text, and thus signals the potential for a maternal voice. Yet although the mother fulfils a distinctive role in the perpetuation of the masculine order, both in the

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<sup>45</sup> This view of the courtly 'dame' as an abstract formulation reflecting the male poet's own subjectivity and desire is a prominent topos in much recent medieval literary criticism. Roberta Krueger points to the reading of female characters as metaphoric functions of 'the feminine', rather than as reflection of historical referents (*Women Readers*, p. 12), while Simon Gaunt states (of twelfth and thirteenth-century romances): ' "women", or more accurately femininity in these texts, is a metaphor men use to construct their own subjectivity. Female characters in romance are not real women, but figures within a male discourse' (*Gender and Genre*, pp. 71-72).

genealogical frame of the text and in the narrative, the extent to which her character is inevitably delineated and contained by her maternal role is still open to question.

### THE FEMININE SPACE

The question of the *chanson de geste*'s depiction of the mother purely in terms of her reproductive function is influenced by two further questions; the inevitability of her confinement to a passive and sublimate corporeality, framed by the image of the reproductive body, and the space and role which is open to female characters in general in the genre. These further questions are themselves inter-related, the framing of the woman in terms of the body being a prevalent topos in medieval religious, scientific, and didactic works, as well as appearing in literary texts.<sup>46</sup> Since the issue as a whole is extensive, the corporeal framing of the specifically maternal body in epic narrative will be considered in the following chapter. The scope which the *chanson de geste* allows to female character will, however, be considered briefly here, as it does influence the possibility for the mother to play a greater role as character in the narrative.

Didactic literature and romance may well articulate an idealised image, or abstract metaphor, of femininity which can be read as reflecting masculine desire and subjectivity, yet the depiction of women in the *chanson de geste* would seem to present a wider range of possibilities for female action.<sup>47</sup> The crucial point here is that the depiction of women in the epic does not necessarily set them into a pattern of

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<sup>46</sup> See the Introduction.

<sup>47</sup> Kay would agree on this point: 'Dans un roman, et encore plus dans une chanson d'amour, une femme est peut-être le point de mire, mais elle risque fort de n'être que cela: un point. Les espaces qu'occupent les femmes dans les chansons de geste ont au moins l'avantage de posséder plus d'ampleur' ('La représentation de la féminité dans les chansons de geste', in *Charlemagne in the North*, Proceedings of the Twelfth International Conference of the Société Rencesvals, Edinburgh 4th to 11th August 1991, ed. by Philip E. Bennett and others (Edinburgh: 1993), pp. 223-40 (p. 225) ).

essentialised passivity, despite the portrayal of the maternal characters considered above. As recent studies of the epic have shown, female aggressiveness is a topos which can, and does, appear, despite the self-definition of the epic world as predominantly male.<sup>48</sup> According to Kimberlee Campbell, 'the incidence of female aggressiveness is limited but unambiguous', a topos which indicates the possibility for female characters to function actively in the epic narrative.<sup>49</sup> This portrayal of women in terms normally reserved for men does not exclude the mother -- in the Guillaume cycle both Guillaume's wife, Guiborc, and his mother, Hermengart, reveal themselves as ready to use force in support of the interests of the family, and of Guillaume in particular. The actions of Hermengart in *Aliscans* provide one of the clearest examples of maternal aggression as she offers both her wealth and herself in support of her son:

Et je meïsmes i seré chevauchant,  
 L'auberc vestu, lacié l'iaume luisant,  
 L'escu au col et au costé le brant.  
 Por ce se j'ai le poil chenu et blanc,  
 S'ai je le cuer hardi et combatant;  
 Si aideré, se Deu plest, mon enfant.  
 N'enconterrai Sarrazin si vaillant  
 Que je ne fiere de mon acier tranchant.  
 Mar i entrerent li Turc ne li Persant. (ll. 3105-14)<sup>50</sup>

Needless to say, this participation in battle does not come about, but the combative force and familial support which it illustrates are evident. Campbell provides further examples of female characters who either fight or who threaten to do so, yet she points to the inherently supportive nature of this female behaviour:

<sup>48</sup> See Kimberlee Anne Campbell, 'Fighting Back: A Survey of Patterns of Female Aggressiveness in the Old French *chanson de geste*' (pp. 241-52) and Catherine M. Jones, ' "Si je fusse hons": les guerrières de *Anseïs de Mes*' (pp. 291-98), both in *Charlemagne in the North*. As Campbell says: 'The *chanson de geste*, as the literary expression of feudalism, tends to represent socio-political success as a function of force -- male force: the measure of a knight's worth is the strength of his sword arm. In the case of the *chanson de geste*, then, the normative influence of generic parameters reinforces the male model' (p. 241). She does go on to point significantly to the possibility for female aggressiveness within the genre, a topos which may be read as undercutting and destabilising this view of the proactive male as normative model.

<sup>49</sup> Campbell, 'Fighting Back', p. 242.

<sup>50</sup> *Aliscans*, ed. by Claude Régnier, 2 vols, C.F.M.A. (Paris: Champion, 1990).

Female aggressiveness, female violence in the Old French epic are reactive rather than active. These women, while certainly not passive, are not, on the other hand, instigators. Women do not depart in search of new realms to conquer, rather their efforts would seem to be directed toward maintenance of the *status quo*, reflecting the traditional conceptualization of the female as a cohesive, stabilizing force.<sup>51</sup>

This notion of a female participation in the upholding of the masculine value system of the *chanson de geste* is also signalled by Simon Gaunt:

Les femmes, n'ayant pas accès au champ de bataille, sont exclues d'office. Elles peuvent parfois assumer un rôle masculin en encourageant les hommes à se battre, à se rendre au '*locus amoenus*', telle Guiborc dans la *Chanson de Guillaume*, et c'est ainsi qu'elles défendent les mêmes valeurs que les hommes, mais sans pouvoir tout de même se battre à leurs côtés; leur féminité les en empêche.<sup>52</sup>

It is apparent that the roles available to the male and female characters of the *chanson de geste* remain clearly differentiated, despite the ability of women to take up an aggressive stance. Although Campbell does point to the subversive element inherent in the pairing of 'force' and 'female', she makes it explicitly clear that the narrative structure of the epic is not one which will allow women to function in the same way as men.<sup>53</sup> The supportive function of female characters referred to by Gaunt should not, however, be read as serving to inscribe them into a 'masculine' role, for the male role is effectively that of knight and warrior. The model of epic masculinity is inscribed as a textual norm through active, rather than 'reactive' aggression. Support of the normative system of values is, however, a role which can be ascribed to women in the epic context, whether or not this entails a display of verbal, or physical, retaliation. However the aggressive role of women is defined, the significant point is that women

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<sup>51</sup> Campbell, 'Fighting Back', pp. 248-49.

<sup>52</sup> Simon Gaunt, 'Le Pouvoir d'achat des femmes dans *Girart de Roussillon*', *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale*, 33 (1990), 305-16 (p. 305).

<sup>53</sup> 'The dominant ideology, which conceptualizes force as essentially male, represents a significant barrier: a woman who is part of the feudal, Christian world may be portrayed as obscuring her sexual identity as a necessary prerequisite to the effective use of physical force, or she may be condemned to a gender-based ineffectuality. The immediate physical consequences of her blows notwithstanding, as herself, retaining her own female identity, she has little political or social impact as a result of her aggressive behaviour' (Campbell, 'Fighting Back', pp. 250-51).

are depicted as playing an established role in the masculine value system of the *chanson de geste*, and as sustaining its symbolic order. The female character is not inevitably confined to an abstract passivity, but is able to participate in the action of the narrative, and to play a valuable role in the maintenance of the social order. As a genre, the epic would therefore seem to allow for a greater play in its framing and depiction of women than does the romance.

This alternative framing of women in regard to the passive/ active dialectic then opens up further the question of the framing of the maternal within the *chanson de geste*. As already seen through the forceful reactions of Hermengart in *Aliscans*, the epic mother is not necessarily constrained or contained by a reduction to a purely reproductive function. The mother can operate as a character, even if her actions are, as in the case of Hermengart, motivated by her maternal attachment to her son. Yet the figuring of the maternal within the genealogical matrix of the epic is still subject to its reproductive, reduplicative imperative. The positioning of the mother at the juncture between father and son still necessitates her encoding in positive value terms. A maternal character may evidently play a role which differs from those which appear in the *chansons de geste* of *Elioxe* and of *Berte as grans piés*, yet the maternal role itself may serve to tie her implacably to the body. The depiction of the mother as character, rather than as reproductive sign, and the extent to which she appears bound within a conceptualising frame of corporeality and matter will be considered in the context of *Raoul de Cambrai*, a text whose maternal characters point to the possibility for a significant maternal presence and voice in the *chanson de geste*.

## CHAPTER 4

### EPIC CORPUS / MATERNAL CORPS : MOTHERHOOD AND LINEAGE IN

#### 'RAOUL DE CAMBRAI'

The symbolic light that a third party, eventually the father, can contribute helps the future subject, the more so if it happens to be endowed with a robust supply of drive energy, in pursuing a reluctant struggle against what, having been the mother, will turn into an object. Repelling, rejecting; repelling itself, rejecting itself. Abjecting.<sup>1</sup>

At best, the body will remain, theoretically too, eternally ambivalent: object and anti-object -- cutting across and annulling the disciplines that claim to unify it; site and non-site -- the site of the unconscious as the non-site of the subject, and so on.<sup>2</sup>

The structure of *Raoul de Cambrai* differs in a significant way from those epics considered so far in that it stands alone as textual entity, bound within the context of itself and its own intrinsic narrative, rather than forming part of an intertextual cycle.<sup>3</sup> The maternal characters of the *récit* are not therefore necessarily subject to the same matriarchal idealisation as those of *Elioxe* or of *Berte as grans pies*. The intertextual repercussions of such an idealisation are not a narrative imperative. Within the text of *Raoul* itself, however, their maternal function does fix them as pivotal nexus between father and son, essential element in the extension of the lineage and in the reduplication of the father. The mother is thus still subject to the strategies of containment which serve to frame the maternal within the 'patrilinear' discourse of the epic text, still open to construction in response to a masculine, or filial, desire. The two main female

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<sup>1</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, p. 117.

<sup>3</sup> Although *Raoul de Cambrai* could be read as belonging to the *Cycle des barons révoltés* (see William C. Calin, *The Old French Epic of Revolt* (Geneva: Droz, 1962), p. 114) it was only incorporated into this cycle during the thirteenth century, and does not fit the narrative paradigm of royal injustice leading to the renunciation of feudal ties, or of traitors provoking the king to attack loyal vassals. The paradigm of *Raoul* lies closer to that of the Lorraine or Nanteuil cycles which depict inter-baronial conflict. In any case, the intertextual reduplication of hero and lineage does not operate in regard to *Raoul*.



protagonists of *Raoul de Cambrai* are both mothers -- Aalais, mother of Raoul, and Marsent, mother of Bernier.<sup>4</sup>

### BINARY REPRESENTATION

Aalais and Marsent, together with their sons and the families which these may be held to represent, the Cambrésiens and the Vermandois, have been read by critics as functioning in binary opposition. This familial coherence may be read as predicated on either an embodiment, or a lack, of moral and spiritual qualities -- an essentialisation which is emphasised by W.C. Calin: 'The two clans are set off against each other, one symbolizing the demonic powers of evil, the other the virtues of heaven'.<sup>5</sup> The symbolic value of the lineage as moral continuum is endemic in the *chanson de geste*, the structuring imperative which this lends to narrative character being evident from the previous chapter, in regard to the heroic lines of Godefroi de Bouillon and of Charlemagne. The conception of the two 'clans' of the Cambrésiens and the Vermandois as polarised and coherent entities would then lead to this type of textual inscription, with the character of lineage, whether noble or villain, being fixed

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<sup>4</sup> All references are to *Raoul de Cambrai*, ed. and trans. by Sarah Kay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). Kay gives the following details of the text's composition: 'It was composed in at least three stages: the assonanced *Raoul Section* (vv. 1-3560) must have had some textual existence before the composition of the Waulsort Chronicle in the mid-twelfth century, but was revised and recast in rhyme at the time of the addition of the *Gautier Section* (vv. 3561-5374), to give rise to what, in common with other scholars, I call *Raoul I* (i.e. vv. 1-5374). Subsequent to this an assonanced continuation (*Raoul II*, vv. 5375-end) was added by a different, and technically inferior, poet. There is evidence that the character of Raoul was widely referred to around the turn of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and this is also the historical period which the song itself reflects. The text represented in A [the most complete of the three manuscripts] was therefore probably composed during the reign of Philippe-Auguste (1180-1223); the language of *RI* suggests a date of composition nearer the beginning; and that of *RII* one nearer the end of that period' (Introduction, p. lxxii-lxxiii). Although Beatrice, wife of Bernier, does become a mother in the final section of the narrative (*RII*), the present study will concentrate on the earlier part of the narrative (*RI*), which is concerned with the initial opposition between the families of Raoul and Bernier. *RI* has the distinction of providing two contrasting maternal 'types' in the characters of Aalais and Marsent, the synchronic nature of their narrative depiction and of their relation to the social world of the text providing a useful way in to the study of alternative configurations of the maternal in *Raoul*.

<sup>5</sup> Calin, *The Old French Epic of Revolt*, p. 177.

and stable. This would then imply the familial inheritance of particular character traits. In *Raoul de Cambrai* this topos of the inheritance of personal quality or characteristics does appear to function, at least to a certain extent, particularly in regard to the mother/son relation of Aalais and Raoul.<sup>6</sup> Similarity of temperament is not, however, sufficient to guarantee a fundamental coherence and continuity to either lineage or to its individual representatives.<sup>7</sup> The classification of lineage according to a moral/immoral dichotomy is more complex and more open to interpretation in *Raoul* than in the epic texts considered so far. Character of lineage and character of character are not reducible to a clear-cut opposition of traits, such as that drawn by Calin, nor can they be held to play clearly defined roles within an archetypal struggle between good and evil.<sup>8</sup>

The same symbolic and religious valuation of the two clans is echoed in Calin's differentiation between the two mothers, Aalais and Marsent: 'The one stands for unbridled violence and pride of destruction, the other for quiet meditation and the search for truth'.<sup>9</sup> This binary representation of the women is however, more complex than the moral opposition drawn between the two families. The strategic importance of the lineage and of its innate character is relevant in the case of Aalais, yet Marsent is unmarried, and is not, therefore, implacably bound within a patrilineage, nor necessarily bound by the reproductive requirements of such a lineage. Their description as moral opposites could, however, be read as reflection of their

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<sup>6</sup> The link with contemporary natural scientific belief is apparent here, the possibility of the moral characteristics and temperament of the mother being inherited by the child acknowledged in both traditional folklore and thirteenth-century medical texts. See the Introduction for further details.

<sup>7</sup> Kay does, however, see the overall narrative as having an essential coherence, despite the unevenness of its literary quality: 'The resulting narrative is nevertheless dynamic rather than disunited, for the continuations reorientate and reinterpret material from their predecessors, and weave together, round the theme of companionship, alternating narratives of oppression and re-emergence' (*Raoul*, p. lxvii).

<sup>8</sup> See Calin, *The Old French Epic of Revolt*, p. 177.

<sup>9</sup> Calin, *The Old French Epic of Revolt*, p. 64. This characterisation of Aalais and Marsent is echoed by Pauline Matarasso: 'Ici éclate la différence fondamentale entre Marsent et Aalais. Où l'une est violente, l'autre est douce; où l'une est irascible, nerveuse, l'autre est patiente, résignée' (Pauline M. Matarasso, *Recherches historiques et littéraires sur 'Raoul de Cambrai'* (Paris: Nizet, 1962), pp. 238-39).

positioning in regard to the social world of the text. Aalais is bound within the feudal context -- widow of Raoul Taillefer, former overlord of the fief of the Cambrésis, and mother of a son wrongfully disinherited by King Louis, she is a forceful advocate of the struggle to regain the Cambrésis.<sup>10</sup> Distanced from the Vermandois family by her lack of marital status, Marsent is further removed from the feudal context by her entry into a convent. As a nun, she should have no further place in the familial structure of the narrative. Yet this initial distinction between the social inscription of the two mothers should not be read as necessarily indicative of their narrative function, nor of their delineation as characters. A clear-cut, binary representation of the Cambrésiens and the Vermandois, including Aalais and Marsent, is not, in fact, an organising structure which is ultimately sustained by the narrative itself. The basis upon which the two families are founded is not one of dichotomous exclusion, their boundaries are inherently more unstable and fluctuating than has been implied.<sup>11</sup> This ambivalence and instability finds expression particularly in the ambiguity of legitimacy, a topos which entwines the two families, destabilising the perceived legitimacy of lineage, inheritance, and, according to Alexandre Leupin, the very interpretation of the text itself.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> For the differentiation in the text between Cambrai and Cambrésis see Sarah Kay, 'Raoul de Cambrai ou Raoul sans terre?', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 84 (1983), 311-17. Kay identifies Cambrai as a town belonging to Aalais, and the Cambrésis as a fief available for the king to bestow.

<sup>11</sup> See Sarah Kay, 'The Character of Character in the *Chansons de Geste*', in *The Craft of Fiction: Essays in Medieval Poetics*, ed. by Leigh A. Arrathoon (Rochester, Michigan: Solaris Press, 1984), pp. 475-98. Kay points to the changing roles of Bernier and Raoul: 'The pacific Bernier occasionally rises to Raoul's implacable belligerence, while Raoul declines into moderation and goodwill' (p. 482). A similar swapping of roles is seen to occur in the case of Bernier and Gautier, Raoul's nephew (p. 483). Kay attributes this character fluctuation to the over-riding nature of the theme of the narrative: 'In such scenes the author's conception of character is manifestly subordinate to his desire to expose the psychology of vendetta and reprobate the incessant renewal of strife. This principal of applauding the doves and blackening the hawks -- unless, of course, they are engaged in a worthwhile warlike crusade -- is constant in the so-called epic of revolt, and applies without regard to the integrity of individual characters' (pp. 483-84).

<sup>12</sup> See Alexandre Leupin, 'Raoul de Cambrai: The Illegitimacy of Writing', trans. by Catherine Jolivet, in *The New Medievalism*, ed. by Marina Brownlee and others (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), pp. 131-54. The representation of legitimacy and the legitimacy of representation in *Raoul* will be considered later in the present chapter.

In any consideration of the two maternal characters, Aalais and Marsent, it is then important to note the complexity of the narrative context in which they are located. Their relation to family and society is troubled by their femininity, a point which will be taken up below, yet it is this textual inscription as feminine/ maternal characters which serves to draw the two together on certain points. Despite the evident difference between Aalais and Marsent: the relation to family and lineage, to the feudal world, and their primary character traits, they do not exist as a moral polarity. The figuring of female character in *Raoul* may not be reduced simply to an opposition of binary terms: aggression/ passivity, evil/ good, or even secular/ religious. Narrative character delineation and textual framing may here be considered as separate issues, yet parallels between the two women may be drawn on both levels. The narrative relation of both Aalais and Marsent to the symbolic order of the epic text is delineated in similar terms, both women supporting the feudal and familial structures of society and text, although to different degrees. The textual framing of the two is likewise similar, structured in response to their maternal function. Both women are positioned at the juncture of father and son in the reproductive structure of the text, a maternal function which is then seen to problematise their integration into the narrative as active characters. Tension is created between narrative form and substance, as the text's ambivalence towards female characters who are not simple, unidimensional projections of a masculine conception and construct of the maternal -- maternal signifiers -- spills over into the narrative itself. This innate tension in the *chanson*, in the depiction of female character, marks *Raoul* as a problematic text in regard to its construction and manipulation of female gender.

Given the complex nature of *Raoul de Cambrai*, a complete study of the text in a single chapter would be impossible. There are, however, certain important themes running through the narrative which are particularly relevant to questions raised so far. As already noted, the imperative function of the family is significant within the text, firstly

as a model for personal identification and allegiance, and secondly as a catalyst which determines and structures the narrative. Family and lineage are active forces in both private and public spheres. The place of the mother within this private/ political divide is then of considerable interest. Given the expansive nature of the maternal role in the *chanson de geste*, in that the characterisation of the mother is not purely confined to her reproductive function, what part may she then be seen to play in a text which devotes so much of its energy to the family and to family loyalty? To what extent may the mother take on an active role in the male political sphere of the epic text, when this may be perceived as an extension of the private sphere of the family?

A further question is based on the depiction of the social world and the nature of lineage within this in *Raoul de Cambrai*. The titles of articles devoted to this text signal the inherent instability of the world it depicts, while Kay's introduction to her edition of *Raoul* marks it out as a theatre of violence, as well as 'an encoding of contemporary political concern'.<sup>13</sup> In the midst of this social and textual disruption, what of the genealogical positioning of the mother in the epic lineage, a lineage in which the categories of legitimate and illegitimate become dislocated? Can the maternal function and the signifying value of the mother themselves remain stable, or are they also open to change and fluctuation?

The final question which this chapter will examine is that of the narrative framing of the mother as reproductive body. The social and political concerns of *Raoul de Cambrai* may appear to provide a space and a voice for the maternal character, yet is this in fact a space from which she may speak, or do the masculine concerns of the

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<sup>13</sup> Examples of articles include: W.C. Calin, 'Raoul de Cambrai: un univers en décomposition', in *Actes du VI<sup>e</sup> Congrès de la Société Rencesvals* (Aix-en-Provence, 1974), pp. 427-38; R. Eisner, 'Raoul de Cambrai ou la tragédie de désordre', *French Review*, 45 (1971), pp. 41-51; or Patricia Harris Stäblein, 'Catastrophe Theory in Reading Narratives: A Way to Figure Out *Raoul de Cambrai* and its Role in the Lyrics of Bertrand de Born', *Olifant*, 8 (1980), 3-28. See also Kay, *Raoul*, pp. lxxvii-lxxiii (lxxvii).

narrative ultimately press the mother back into the political unconscious of the text?<sup>14</sup> The themes which the study of *Raoul* will address are therefore those relating to the social and political space and the mother's place in this; the inherent characterisation of lineage as an unstable and volatile concept and the effect of this on the maternal character; and the allocation of the mother to the realm of the body, signalling her exclusion from the masculine social space.

### FEUDAL AND FAMILIAL ALLEGIANCE

Although no intertextual, genealogical imperative is exerted on the construction of maternal character in *Raoul de Cambrai*, the suitability of Aalais as wife and mother is nonetheless signalled from the beginning of the tale. As sister of Louis, her nobility is unquestionable, a valuation which then affirms the social worth of Raoul Taillefer as Aalais is given to him as gift in recognition of his service to the emperor:

L'enpereor de France tant servi  
que l'enpereres li a del tot merit:  
de Canbrisin an droit fié le vesti  
et mollier belle, ains plus belle ne vis. (ll. 21-24)<sup>15</sup>

From the outset, the depiction of Aalais marks her physical integration into the feudal context, as Raoul Taillefer is simultaneously invested with the fief of the Cambrésis

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<sup>14</sup> For use of the term 'political unconscious' (borrowed from Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*), and the notion of characters being pressed into counter-narrative see Kay, *The 'Chansons de geste'*, also her introduction to *Raoul*, pp. lxx-lxxii. Although Kay does not speak in great detail of the maternal characters in *Raoul*, she does point to the marginality of women and children in the epic world (*Raoul*, Introduction, p. lxxi).

<sup>15</sup> The linking of women and land is a prevalent topos within both epic and romance; see Kay, *The 'Chansons de geste'*, Chapter 1. This conforms to the notion of the 'gift economy' as opposed to the 'commodity economy' suggested by Marilyn Strathern in *The Gender of the Gift. Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). Kay, however, points to the functioning of both these types of economy in the epic: 'the two conceptions of economy are complementary, and both are produced from within modern Western rhetoric [...] the economy of the gift is what is concealed by our modern concentration on the commodity. I find that in the *chansons de geste*, rather than being distinct economic systems, these are complementary semiotics which can and do coexist' (Kay, *The 'Chansons de geste'*, p. 39).



and with her body. The narrative discourse of *Raoul* is at this point one of legitimacy, as the feudal and monarchical system of recognition and endowment is seen to function in a manner authorised by society and by the epic context. The narrative's later slippage into 'illegitimacy' sees the distorted echo of this double endowment as Aalais' son, Raoul, is granted the fief of the Vermandois and is marked by death (ll. 812-31).<sup>16</sup> The validity of the initial gift of the fief of the Cambrésis, is, however, marked by the paradigmatic quality of Aalais, who is: 'La gentil dame au gent cor avenant' (l. 38), 'la dame au cors vaillant' (l. 45), and 'Dame Aalais n'ot pas le cuer frarin' (l. 52). Her personal worth and beauty mark her as fitting consort for the noble hero. The production of a male heir to Raoul Taillefer (although after his death) then cements her firmly into the ideal mould of wife and mother. In addition to these formal qualities of epic womanhood (qualities of form and structure as opposed to narrative substance) the significant characteristic of Aalais is her loyalty to her husband's family. She refuses to remarry after his death (ll. 214-18), supports their son, Raoul, in his struggle to regain the patrimony, and counsels him in accordance with his legal and feudal rights (ll. 811-22). It is this great allegiance to blood and patrilineage which defines her character, grounding it within the narrative. Aalais here becomes character rather than feminine/ maternal signifier. As Calin states: 'she is a real protagonist in the action, one of the very few women characters in the French epic to assume a man's role, as it were, and lead a personal existence above and beyond that of her son or husband'.<sup>17</sup> The weight of Aalais as individual and subjective character is such that Calin immediately expresses this in gendered terms. Aalais is a protagonist rather than a passive token within the narrative structure. She has a voice that goads and taunts and expresses opinion. She is therefore read as assuming 'a man's role', yet this is a reading of female epic character which cuts against the

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<sup>16</sup> This return to, and echoing of, topoi and motifs throughout the course of the narrative is signalled by Kay: '*Raoul de Cambrai* is thus a network of reflections of, commentaries on, and products of its own poetic material' (*Raoul*, p. lxxii).

<sup>17</sup> Calin, *The Old French Epic of Revolt*, p. 171.

grain.<sup>18</sup> As already seen, the *chanson de geste* allows greater scope for the portrayal of female character than does the romance, Aalais' role therefore does not need to be gendered as masculine in order for her to function as a textual protagonist. Her depiction, although revealing of her forcefulness, is consistent with the *topoi* which signal acceptable female behaviour in the epic.

The driving force and motivation behind Aalais' character, her kinship loyalty, is not a static, unidimensional feature, but one which is seen to change emphasis and direction during the course of the narrative. Following the early dispossession of her fatherless son, and King Louis' granting of the fief of the Cambrésis to Giboin le Mancel, Aalais' words pursue legitimacy as she urges Raoul to fight for his feudal rights. The alternative would be to accept Louis' offer of the fief of the Vermandois on the death of its overlord, Herbert, a move which would mean the disinheritance of Herbert's four sons:

'Biax fix Raous', dist la dame au vis fier,  
'a si grant tort guere ne commencer. (ll. 855-56)

Biax fix Raous, un conseil vos requier,  
q'as fix Herbert vos faites apaisier  
et de la guere acorder et paier.  
Laisse lor terre, il t'en aront plus chier,  
si t'aideront t'autre guere a baillier  
et le Mancel del país a chacier.' (ll. 916-21)

Aalais' discourse is thus one of re-establishment. Two inter-related, yet separate, structures of allegiance may be seen in operation here: feudal and familial. Owing to Louis' ill-considered re-allocation of fiefs, the smooth function of the ideal feudal structure is disturbed, the continuity of the inheritance of fiefs reduced to a game of pass-the-parcel, or rather musical chairs, where the last in line are dropped from the game. Although in dispute with each other, the actions of King Louis and of Raoul

<sup>18</sup> See Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, pp. 62-70, for the notion of women in the *chanson de geste* as supplement to the genre's construction of masculinity.

collude in this destabilising of the social order.<sup>19</sup> At this point, it is the voice of Aalais which may be read as upholding the established economy of the social structure.<sup>20</sup> Her aim is the restitution of a discourse of legitimacy whose original veracity the text leaves open to question, yet this discourse is one which Aalais recognises as providing both a stable social framework and a legitimate inheritance for her son.<sup>21</sup> In addition to the threat posed to the continuity of the feudal structure by disinheritance and displacement, Aalais also points to its threatening of the bonds of allegiance and companionship: Count Herbert, deceased overlord of the Vermandois, was friend to Raoul's father; Raoul should therefore be at peace with his sons (ll. 811-22). Aalais thus reveals herself as both politically and socially aware, recognising the feudal and social bonds which her brother Louis also recognises, yet ultimately rejects, and which Raoul himself does not even appear to acknowledge. Paradoxically, it is the female character of Aalais who speaks most evidently from a position which upholds the established masculine order of society and text, while the negotiations and manoeuvres of the male representatives of that order only emphasise its instability.

Initially, Aalais' support of the interests of the family would appear to parallel and to concur with her support of the feudal structure. Restitution of the fief of the Cambrésis to Raoul by Louis would represent a return to legitimacy for both the Cambrésiens and for the monarchy, as well as a re-establishment of the ordering of

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<sup>19</sup> Louis first of all gives the Cambrésis to Giboin le Mancel, who accepts the proviso that the infant Raoul will not thereby be disinherited. The condition however being that Giboin will also be given Aalais in marriage, a gift which she refuses to become (ll. 129-30). Louis then promises the adult Raoul the first fief which becomes vacant (ll. 556-63). Raoul's acceptance of this arrangement is, in a sense, illegitimate, as it leads in turn to the disinheriting of Count Herbert's sons.

<sup>20</sup> Leupin identifies the feminine speech of Aalais with the Name-of-the-Father, the Lacanian principle for structuring the symbolic ('The Illegitimacy of Writing', p. 141).

<sup>21</sup> The question of the existence of an 'original' discourse of legitimacy in *Raoul* is one which does remain open, since from the very beginning the narrative reveals itself as unstable and ambiguous in regard to its portrayal of both the feudal and the familial structure, as well as in its definition of the term 'legitimacy' itself. The 'legitimacy' which the text seeks, and periodically claims, is projected as literary myth rather than as recognition of an operative social reality -- a problem which will be considered further later in this chapter. For a discourse of legitimacy/ illegitimacy in the *chanson* see Leupin, 'The Illegitimacy of Writing'.

society according to a sequential, linear form of feudal inheritance.<sup>22</sup> The position which Aalais occupies at this point in the narrative is not open to a clear differentiation between its forms of allegiance, except in regard to the monarchy. The private interests of the family as a coherent entity and the public interest of feudal society appear indivisible, only Louis himself being placed in direct opposition to Aalais' desire for re-establishment. Although Thelma Fenster sees the whole of the *récit* of *Raoul* as 'a filial discourse' and views Aalais as representing the interests of the father against those of the son, it is also in the interests of her son that Aalais may be seen to argue.<sup>23</sup> Her position on a war against the Vermandois may well ally her with the Name-of-the-Father, with the masculine Symbolic, as pointed out by Leupin, yet this does not negate Aalais' continuing emphasis on Raoul's personal and political welfare as her son. Her recognition of the threat which such a war poses to him is strongly featured by the text:

Qi te donna Peronne et Origni  
et Saint Quentin, Neele et Falevi,  
[Et] Ham et Roie et le tor de Clari,  
de mort novele, biax fix, te ravesti. (ll. 812-15)

Land and death are bound together in Aalais' prophecy, reiterated and underscored by the following *laisse* (ll. 829-31).<sup>24</sup> The explicit and insistent naming of the lands of

<sup>22</sup> It should be noted that the narrative gives no indication of a possible return to this state of legitimate inheritance. Although Louis manifests disquiet at the idea of dispossessing Count Herbert's sons, he does not, on the other hand, suggest a re-allocation of Cambrésis to Raoul (ll. 669-79).

<sup>23</sup> Thelma Fenster states: 'What the narrating voice writes -- that is, what it includes, excludes, and the way in which it deploys the material -- is thus written through a discourse of the hero as son, a filial discourse, which privileges the interests of the "son", who is therefore represented not only by son characters but by the very text itself' ('The Son's Mother: Aalais and Marsent in *Raoul de Cambrai*', *Olifant*, 12 (1987), 77-92 (p. 78) ). The 'filial discourse' to which Fenster refers is that of Raoul, an assessment of the text which would appear highly debatable, despite the narrative prominence of his character. Alternatively, I would argue that the inherent instability of the narrative of *Raoul* produces an intermingling and overlaying of differing ideological discourses; the ambiguity of the *chanson* precludes its reduction to one particular discourse alone. Neither can the text itself ultimately be read as representing Raoul, the 'hero as son', for his heroism is laid open to question, his own 'legitimacy' destabilised, and his lineage brought to extinction, while the text which bears his name remains open-ended and unaffiliated.

<sup>24</sup> The prophesying of Aalais has been noted by several critics, who see it as a particularly feminine function, inscribing Aalais into the realm of the 'Other'. Matarasso, for instance, says on this point: 'Il n'est pas étonnant que le poète ait conçu Aalais douée d'une intuition, toute féminine encore qui

the Vermandois inscribes them as blows in the consciousness of the text, each illegitimate investiture insisting on, and bringing closer, Raoul's imminent death. Although taking a stance against her son's desire, Aalais may yet be seen to be aiming to protect him at this point -- her advice is expedient in both feudal and familial terms; the political and the private appear conjoint, whatever the prime motivation behind Aalais' advice may in reality be. This projection of a coherent upholding of the interests of both Raoul and the lineage as one and the same, is, however, fractured and undermined by her curse:

Or viex aler tel terre chalengier  
ou tes ancestres ne prist ainz un denier,  
et qant por moi ne le viex or laisier,  
cil Damedieix q'i tout a a jugier  
ne t'en remaint sain ne sauf ne entier! (ll. 953-57)<sup>25</sup>

Despite Aalais' immediate repentance (*laisse* LV) the narrator's interjection marks the curse as definitive: 'Par cel maldit ot il tel destorbier, / con vos orez, de la teste trenchier!', (ll. 958-59). The curse has been read as the upsurge of Aalais' innate *desmesure*, a trait which is echoed and extended in the character of her son. As Matarasso states: 'Telle mère, tel fils. Comme Raoul, Aalais est entièrement dominée par ses sentiments'.<sup>26</sup> In addition to marking the mother-son parallel, Aalais' words

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s'accorde bien avec sa nature frémissante et inquiète et qui forme une contraste artistique avec les caractères masculins plus carrés et moins sensibles' (*Recherches historiques*, p. 235). Kay notes, 'The casting of women characters in the role of prophets has a long history, but it is noteworthy that they thereby emerge as narrator figures in the otherwise extremely male-orientated world of the *chansons de geste*' (*Raoul*, Introduction, p. lxviii, note 115). Aalais' prophesying thus privileges her in the context of both the construction and content of the narrative. Her prophecy acts as channel for the narrator, at one and the same time signalling and constructing the narrative's future. Within the narrative itself, this intuition also serves to reveal her political acumen, thus signalling Raoul's innate lack of this.

<sup>25</sup> The maternal discourse of Aalais could alternatively be read as fractured by Raoul himself, as he chooses the 'paternal discourse' of Louis over that of his mother. Raoul certainly places self before family, and could also be seen as placing state before family, as his choice allies him with the king's strategy of the transferal of fiefs. Responsibility for the subsequent disaster and death is, however, shifted by the poet from Raoul as politico-military agent to Aalais as supernatural predictor and manipulator of fate.

<sup>26</sup> Matarasso, *Recherches historiques*, p. 235.

inscribe the imminent demise of Raoul as now inevitable; he is invested with death and cursed by death.

Aalais' cursing of Raoul marks a significant alteration in the nature of her allegiance to the family. Raoul's decision to pursue the fief of the Vermandois may be read as a rejection of the familial inheritance. This, coupled with his emphatic rejection of Aalais and her advice (ll. 925-31) then rebounds upon him as he is in turn rejected by his mother. The echoes of verbal violence are thus not dissipated, but resound through the text, provoking further violence. Aalais' curse marks the ultimate disinheritance of Raoul, as he is now no longer incorporated in her conception of the family as coherent entity. Although already functioning in political opposition to Aalais, Raoul is now placed symbolically outside the bounds of the family, no longer supported and sustained by his mother's pursuit of political and familial re-establishment. This splitting and disjuncture of the family is paralleled by the increasing fragmentation of the social order of the narrative.

Raoul's death at the hands of Bernier then sees a further shift in Aalais' supportive function. The paralleling of the two forms of allegiance -- feudal and familial -- is now broken apart, as Aalais pursues vengeance rather than justifiable restitution. Her upholding of feudal values in a discourse of legitimacy which privileged the masculine social order is subjugated to the imperatives of family honour, and it is Aalais who now replaces Raoul's uncle, Guerri, as the driving force behind the feuding of the Cambrésiens and the Vermandois. Pauline Matarasso says of her at this point:

Aalais à la perte de son fils est réellement inconsolable; elle l'aimait de toutes ses forces. Mais une partie de cet amour maternel se vouait non à l'individu, mais à ce représentant d'une illustre famille, seul héritier de son père, seul à porter en lui le sang des générations antérieures.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Matarasso, *Recherches historiques*, p. 234.



It is this representation, this embodiment, of blood and lineage which ultimately proves the focus and motivation of Aalais. Raoul's death reinscribes him into the Cambrésien clan in a way which was impossible during his lifetime; he becomes its symbolic, rather than its actual heir, refigured in relation to the desire of the lineage.<sup>28</sup> Raoul's individual desire for conquest and possession is suppressed, yet not negated by his death, for its impetus is carried forward, absorbed into the entity which is the clan. As pointed out by Kay, in *Raoul de Cambrai* 'outrages committed are stored up as a potential source of narrative renewal'; the force of violence works to build up a 'latent store of counter-narratives' whose repercussions are felt throughout the text.<sup>29</sup> In a similar way, Raoul, as a figure of violence, is recycled, his force entering into the consciousness of the clan and redirecting its focus.

Despite this redefinition of Aalais' allegiance and the alteration in its essential expression -- from pacifist re-establishment to aggressive acquisition -- its direction is still, nonetheless, ultimately legitimate. Although no longer upholding the feudal bonds of companionship and loyalty, her pursuit of vengeance is justified in the context of clan and family loyalty. Rather than a transition between the legitimate and the illegitimate, Aalais' transference of focus is from an apparent conjuncture of public and private interests to the private alone, although the narrative of this familial struggle is one which is then played out in the public sphere. In terms of her positioning within the structuring frame of the text, Aalais is continually seen to be allied with the masculine subject position, her desire for vengeance is not reducible to a purely

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<sup>28</sup> The introduction of the character of Heloïs, Raoul's fiancée, following his death serves to heighten the impression of his chivalric qualities. Heloïs' delineation in formal, stereotypical terms as richly dressed and beautiful: 'plus bele fame ne fu onques en vie' (l. 3484), establishes her own credentials, her vaunting of Raoul then works to validate him retrospectively as epic hero: 'Qant vos seiés el destrier d'Orqanie, / rois resamblés q' grant barnage guie; / qant avîés çaint l'espee forbie, / l'elme lacié sor la coife sarcie, / n'avoit si bel dusqes en Hongerie. / Las, or depart la nostre druerie! / Mors felonese, trop par fustes hardie / q' a tel prince osas faire envaïe! / Por sul itant qe je sui vostre amie, / n'avri signor en trestoute ma vie' (ll. 3490-500). Although Heloïs does not fall dead, as does Aude, fiancée of the hero in the *Chanson de Roland*, the topos of female self-consecration to the dead fiancé again functions to inscribe his supreme worth.

<sup>29</sup> Kay, *Raoul*, Introduction, p. lxxi.

maternal desire, a grieving for the loss of her only son. The familial allegiance which she manifests may rather be read as a recognition and a supporting of the rights of the patrilineage and of family honour, a topos which features in relation to both male and female characters in the *chanson de geste*.

### THE SPLIT MOTHER

As pointed out above, Marsent's position in the social structure of *Raoul de Cambrai* is radically different from that of Aalais, her unmarried motherhood implying a dislocation and distancing from the epic framework of patrilineage and inheritance. A further remove is brought about by the circumscription of her character in the religious sphere, a positioning which bounds her morally and spiritually, as well as physically, within the walls of the convent at Origny. The pull and tension invoked between the two worlds, the secular and the religious, parallels that between the two temporal versions of Marsent herself: the young woman of the pre-text, before the writing and textual delineation of character begins, and the abbess of the present. Despite the privileging of the present through its fixing and setting in the written word of the text, the diachronic utterance of the narrative creates a past which destabilises this present. The different versions of Marsent overlap but do not appear as synthesised, her character is thus open to interpretation both by other characters and by the audience of the *récit*. The audience's knowledge of Marsent is, in fact, mediated to a large extent through the perceptions of the two sons of the narrative, Raoul and Bernier. The image projected through the voices of the two men manifests itself as a duality, constructing Marsent as a split character, a place where the opposing female images of whore and saint are juxtaposed but not resolved. Raoul's words to her before his attack upon the town and convent of Origny reveal his perception of her sexuality:

'Voir', dist Raous, 'vos estes losengiere.  
 Je ne sai rien de putain chanberiere  
 qi ait esté corsaus ne maailliere,  
 a toute gens communax garsoniere.  
 Au conte Ybert vos vi je soldoiere;  
 la vostre chars ne fu onques trop chiere --  
 se nus en vost, par le baron Saint Piere,  
 por poi d'avoir en fustes traite ariere!' (ll. 1151-58)

Conversely, for Bernier, Marsent is 'douce mere' (l. 1331), 'gentix feme' (l. 1490), 'fille a un chevalier' (l. 1492). His account of her life (ll. 1491-1516) establishes her as honourable; passive victim rather than active transgressor. A noblewoman, married to a knight who left to fight abroad, Marsent was then taken 'par force' (l. 1507) by Ybert, who made her pregnant with Bernier, then cast her off and married another woman. Both male voices serve to construct an image of Marsent which functions prior to the present narrative, yet their diametric opposition allows the privileging of neither term. The positive image which Bernier projects is only able to be reinforced through a voicing of Marsent's own choice, a choice which serves to inscribe her into the spiritual positivity of her present context: 'Doner li vost Joifroi, mais ne le sist; / nonne devint, le millor en eslist' (ll. 1515-16). Marsent rejected the prospective husband, Joifroi, offered to her by Ybert, instead choosing the 'better path' of entering a convent.<sup>30</sup> Her self-definition as nun rather than as wife or concubine thus acts as a third element in the fiction of femininity constructed by the opposing textual voices.

The conflicting interpretations of Marsent given by Raoul and Bernier may be read as structured by their own personal interests: Raoul's antagonism towards her is fuelled by his feud with the Vermandois, family of Bernier, and Bernier's defence is

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<sup>30</sup> This rejection of a husband parallels Aalais' refusal to remarry following Raoul Taillefer's death (ll. 214-18). If Marsent becomes 'bride of Christ', then Aalais becomes 'bride of the clan', a similarity which links dedication to God with that to the family, justifying Aalais' position of familial loyalty yet further.

ultimately a defence of his own innate nobility of being.<sup>31</sup> His mother cannot be anything other than honourable, even if he himself is illegitimate. In addition to producing a fractured and indecipherable image, the two fictions also work to reinforce the opposition which the narrative draws between the two men. The split object which is Marsent can only be accessed or interpreted through the audience's prior knowledge of the characters whose voices construct it; their opposed legitimacy and illegitimacy and the feud that lies between them. As Kay points out:

Their two narratives polarize their differences. Yet they also present the similarity that both men define their relationships to one another over women: the woman as scandal (Raoul), the woman as victim (Bernier). Both see the woman's place in patriarchal terms: it is her relation to the father (or the Father) which is her essential quality.<sup>32</sup>

Such an interpretation, based on the narrative relations between men, would lead to the conception of the woman as a void, a space to be filled and manipulated by the masculine voices of the text.<sup>33</sup> Each of these is then able to construct Marsent's relation to the father (Ybert) in a way which suits his own immediate purpose. Raoul is seen to speak from a paternal/ patriarchal position rendered transcendent by the suppression of the two husbands, Ybert and Raoul Taillefer (through death or transfiguration). He inscribes himself into the text's paternal space, voicing the masculine ideal of a feminine absolute with no allowance for the influence of male behaviour. Rather than producing an account of Marsent, to be understood and accepted as verbatim by the audience, these edited abstracts of her narrative reflect the

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<sup>31</sup> According to Fenster, Raoul's antagonism towards Marsent stems from entirely different reasons: 'In the view of the Family Romance, Raoul's accusations against Marsent [of her being a whore] incriminate her for an act of adultery committed against Raoul himself, for she engendered his squire, his "son", with another man. And at the same time, just as Ybert is himself presented as both a father and a son, so Raoul has that same dual identity; from that conflated perspective, Marsent incurs his wrath as both mother and wife' ('The Son's Mother', p. 89). This reading of Raoul as 'father' to Bernier hinges on the critical employment of Freud's concept of the family romance narrative, in which the son fantasises the father, inscribing a superior, surrogate father in place of the real. Despite the applicability of this concept to *Raoul de Cambrai*, owing to the father's symbolic significance and the functioning of an evident surrogate father topos, the symbolic positioning of Marsent as 'wife' to Raoul would seem somewhat far-fetched.

<sup>32</sup> Kay, *The 'Chansons de geste'*, p. 73.

<sup>33</sup> See in particular Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women' and Eve Sedgwick, *Between Men*, for the patriarchal construction of male-male relations and the place of women in this economy.

masculine narratives of the two sons themselves. The present of Marsent as character is thus jeopardised by the opposing fictions of anteriority which Raoul and Bernier present.

It is the invocation of Marsent's self-definition as a nun by Bernier which ultimately presses Raoul's narrative account into counter-narrative. The identification of Marsent with Church rather than society, spirit rather than flesh, and the evident marking of this as laudable ('le millor en eslist', l. 1516), affirms the positive reading of her character constructed by her son. The important point here is that the self-chosen definition of Marsent is the one which is carried over from the verbal fictions of her past to provide her present definition, delineated and fixed in the temporal space of the textual framework. This narrative continuum causes Marsent's construction of herself to outweigh the prior, male fictions of Raoul and of Bernier. The authority of this self-interpretation is supported by her subsequent speech and actions, projected directly to the audience rather than mediated through the perception and deception of intervening characters. She defends herself against Raoul's accusations:

'Diex!' dist la dame, 'or oi parole fiere!  
Laidengier m'oi par estrainge maniere!  
Je ne fu onques corsaus ne maailliere.  
S'uns gentils hom fist de moi sa maistriere,  
un fil en oi dont encor sui plus fiere.  
La merci Dieus ne m'ent met pas ariere:  
qi bien sert Dieu, il li mostre sa chiere. (ll. 1159-65)

God is Marsent's ultimate point of reference. Yet she is not purely a figure confined and bounded by the religious world, although this is the world against which her present definition is read. The inherent tension between the diverse narratives which attempt to construct Marsent's character still remains apparent within the text, the repercussions of her grounding and marking as positive within the religious context do, however, produce an anterior resonance. Her prior image as woman and mother is re-invented, re-articulated by her present holiness, producing a synthesis of secular

and religious positivity. The dual role of Marsent, as mother and as abbess, is thus continually present in the narrative conscious, creating tension, yet their inter-relation also articulating her validity in both contexts.

Like Aalais, Marsent is a character who situates herself and speaks from within the bounds of the masculine order. Her decision to step from the secular frame and become a nun does not negate her continuing relevance within this order, or within the reproductive matrix of the text. As a mother, Marsent is marked and valued as positive, an inscription which is both enhanced by and reflected in the narrative's positive evaluation of Bernier, despite his illegitimacy in legal terms. Bernier is his father's only son, and as such, is ultimately made heir to Ybert's land by his father (ll. 5218-19), an acknowledgement which speaks against and, to an extent, nullifies his bastardy (see below). Marsent's support of legitimacy, stability and continuity is not as forcefully or as aggressively voiced as that of Aalais, yet it is markedly present. She too argues against war and violence, praying that Raoul will spare the convent (ll. 1127-29; 1146-50); the words 'Nos some nonnes' (l. 1148) inscribing as sacred an image which is about to be broken and despoiled by the destabilising force which Raoul represents. Again in parallel with Aalais, Marsent's recognition of familial and feudal duty and loyalty is prominent, these operating despite the divided nature of Bernier's family. Although the tie with Ybert appears the weakest link here (he only refers briefly to Marsent after her death), the bonds between Bernier and his mother are evidently close and the paternal-filial bond is recognised by mother, son and, finally, father. Feudal loyalty is, however, the prime mover in the symbolic structure of society. Initially aghast at Bernier's perceived lack of loyalty towards his father and uncles as he joins Raoul in the war against them (ll. 1143-45), Marsent then acknowledges the correctness of her son's conduct: ' "Fix", dist la mere,"par ma foi,



droit en as; / ser ton signor, Dieu en gaaingneras" ' (ll. 1209-10).<sup>34</sup> The delineation of Marsent's character writes her into the narrative in epic terms. Although a nun, she is seen to uphold the same values as Aalais, that 'image of the feudal matron', as referred to by Calin.<sup>35</sup> Her positioning as maternal nexus in the reproductive frame of lineage is also comparable to that of Aalais, despite their initial apparent divergence.

#### UNITY AND FRAGMENTATION

On the level of its form and structure, the instability and ambiguity of *Raoul de Cambrai* is strongly marked in regard to both narrative and text. Kay points to the problems of determining the narrative of the three separate manuscripts, the *Raoul Section* being common to all, the *Gautier Section* probably existing in all, yet the final section, *RII*, being absent from Manuscript B, and existing in different forms in Manuscripts A and C. The conclusion then being: 'the poem of *Raoul de Cambrai* seems to possess less narrative stability as the story moves on from the career of its hero to that of his successors. The poem, like the text, is subject to *mouvance*'.<sup>36</sup> The impossibility of pinning down and fixing details of textual composition and narrative is one which is common to many medieval texts, yet in the case of *Raoul* this extrinsic fluidity is mirrored in the internal fluctuations of narrative substance and character. According to Calin: 'We find ourselves in a torn, ambiguous world, where the norms of feudal society are no longer conducive to existence'.<sup>37</sup> While Kay invokes the

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<sup>34</sup> Matarasso's interpretation of this scene reads quite differently: 'Marsent a un esprit avant tout pratique. C'est Bernier qui doit lui rappeler le problème moral, lui expliquer son devoir, justifier sa conduite. Alors elle ne tarde plus à l'approuver' (*Recherches historiques*, p. 240). This reading, however, does not sit well with Marsent's obvious distress when she believes that Bernier is fighting against his own kin by choice (ll. 1143-45).

<sup>35</sup> Calin, *The Old French Epic of Revolt*, p. 170.

<sup>36</sup> Kay, *Raoul*, Introduction, pp. 1-11.

<sup>37</sup> Calin, *The Old French Epic of Revolt*, p. 115. Peter Haidu, however, sees this violence as endemic to the *chanson de geste* as a whole: 'It is precisely in the *chanson de geste*, the sung epics of medieval France, that violence is repeatedly displayed. The narrative kernel of these narrative poems is the social turbulence, the "irrepressible violence" ("*cette violence incoercible*") of a political

crisis situation of 'the three relations that structure medieval society -- companionship, feudalism, and the family', Gaunt sees *Raoul* as narrating 'the death of the epic ideal, for it systematically unpicks all the male bonds which underpin the ethical system of the *chansons de geste*: the bonds of king and vassal, of kinsmen and particularly of companions'.<sup>38</sup> In all cases, *Raoul* is viewed as presenting a scene of crisis, breaking apart, and decay which functions in regard both to the external ideology which structures the text and to its internal narrative content.<sup>39</sup>

One of the principal causes of feudal disruption in *Raoul*, in a manner which does draw the *chanson* into line with the *cycle des barons révoltés*, is seen to be king Louis, whose misjudgement and mismanagement of his monarchical role and duties jeopardise the social framework. In the symbolic structure of the text Louis' position as monarch inscribes him as the representative of the Father, the Lacanian *nom-du-père*, opposing him to the maternal/ familial discourse of Aalais. The voice of the Father thus becomes a source of discord and destabilisation; the maternal voice a force for cohesion and stability. Louis' dual role as symbolic Father and as king may be held to represent the essence of the social crisis of *Raoul*, as that which should uphold and sustain the social order, the patriarch/ monarch, becomes its enemy -- the order is subverted from within. In the same way, any hope of cohesive family unity to which the Cambrésiens may have aspired is split apart by the family's own internal discord. The structuring frames of both public and private relations are thus undercut by internal strife, producing a narrative which consistently turns in upon itself, the

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conflict' (Haidu, *The Subject of Violence: The 'Song of Roland' and the Birth of the State* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 2). Haidu here quotes Jean-Pierre Poly and Eric Bournazel, *La Mutation féodale: Xe-XIIe siècles* (Paris: P.U.F., 1980), pp. 452f.

<sup>38</sup> Kay, *Raoul*, Introduction, p. ix, and Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, p. 52. See also Calin, 'Raoul de Cambrai: un univers en décomposition'.

<sup>39</sup> This breaking down of social relations may reflect a particular type of generic patterning -- that of the *Cycle des barons révoltés* -- yet this in turn has been read as symptomatic of social and political changes taking place in late twelfth and thirteenth-century France: see Matarasso, *Recherches historiques*.

bounded nature of its topography and of its inter-familial relations signalling the introvert, self-replicating nature of the narrative itself.<sup>40</sup>

If Louis may be held to represent the fracturing of the feudal order, the figure which embodies the forces of familial disruption is that of Raoul. His demanding of the Vermandois in place of the Cambrésis (ll. 661-68), marks the first stage in his alienation from the clan and of his slippage from legitimacy, for the land of the Cambrésis represents the continuity of patrilinearity which binds inheritance and lineage incontrovertibly together. The words of Aalais' curse mark this symbolic linkage of land and ancestry (ll. 953-57). Significantly, the identification of land and ancestry in a continuum which finds its end and its voice in the persona of Aalais is one which the text marks as sanctioned by God. By claiming the Vermandois, Raoul is denying the ancestral voice and its inheritance (although the fief of the Cambrésis was in fact first held by his father), a memory kept alive and renewed by the maternal voice of Aalais. Through this replacement of a legitimate focus (the Cambrésis) by an illegitimate one (the Vermandois), Raoul simultaneously rejects the continuity of ancestry, inscribed in the land of the father and voiced by the mother, social/ feudal legitimacy, and justification by God. His own validity as representative both of the patrilineage and of the text's own discourse of legitimacy is then destabilised and inverted, the very categories of legitimacy and illegitimacy laid open to speculation.

Fixity of representation is then a topos which does not operate consistently or coherently in *Raoul de Cambrai*. The categories of representation -- hero/ villain,

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<sup>40</sup> For the reduction of external space as the narrative of *Raoul de Cambrai* progresses see William Calin, *A Muse for Heroes: Nine Centuries of the Epic in France*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), pp. 51-53. Of the text's effective use of spatial limitation in general he states: 'Alienation is perhaps most strongly expressed in spatial terms. Too far from Spain or southern Italy, no outside-oriented crusades are provided for these people. And no vertical vistas, leading up to God. Indeed, the barons act like invading Saracens, ravaging *dulce France* for their own purposes. In this limited, too sharply defined space where there is not enough land for all, they impede each other and cannot escape' (p. 51).

unity/ division, legitimacy/ illegitimacy -- which should work to frame the epic world and its narrative are revealed as ambiguous and fluid, their function as aids to interpreting this world is lost, or at least, destabilised and confused. Within this shifting of meaning and loss of stable categorisation the textual inscription of character and of its value as signifier is opened up to a significant amount of play. This expansion and blurring of the link between signifier and signified, between character and its 'meaning' or representative function, connects with Kristeva's distinction between symbol and sign as models characterising two different types of thought process, linguistic practice, and narrative form.<sup>41</sup> The symbolic structure of the world of the *chanson de geste*, of the world of the text in general up until the thirteenth century, is viewed by Kristeva as based on the model of the symbol, as opposed to that of the sign. She characterises this model as follows:

It is a cosmogonic semiotic practice where the elements (symbols) refer back to one or more unknowable and unrepresentable universal transcendence(s); univocal connections link the transcendences to the units evoking them; the symbol does not 'resemble' the object it symbolizes; the two spaces (symbolized-symbolizer) are separate and cannot communicate.<sup>42</sup>

The symbol thus appears stable and entire, despite the ambiguity perceptible in this referring back to an *unknowable* transcendence. Its univocality and the gulf which remains between symbol and its referent does, however, lend it a self-limiting, self-fulfilling quality; the positive aspects of the monologic symbol are countered by its inherently static, repressive nature.<sup>43</sup> Kristeva sees the thirteenth century as marking

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<sup>41</sup> See Julia Kristeva, 'From Symbol to Sign', in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), pp. 62-73. Kristeva here draws on the work of P.N. Medvedev and of C.S. Peirce, as well as that of Saussure. Moi summarises: 'Briefly, her argument is that the general conception of the sign developed away from the idea of the sign as a transcendental closure and towards a linguistic practice which implied that it was an open-ended material structure' (p. 62).

<sup>42</sup> Kristeva, 'From Symbol to Sign', p. 64.

<sup>43</sup> 'The symbol's function, in its vertical dimension (universals-markings), is thus one of restriction. In its horizontal dimension (the articulation of signifying units in relation to one another) the function of the symbol is one of escaping the paradox; one might say that the symbol is horizontally *anti-paradoxical*: within its 'logic' two opposing units are exclusive' (Kristeva, 'From Symbol to Sign', p. 65).

the beginning of a period of transition from symbol to sign, a shift which called into question 'the transcendental unity supporting the symbol -- its other-worldly wrapping, its transmitting focus'.<sup>44</sup> The unity and coherency of the relation between the symbol and the transcendence which it evoked began to be replaced by 'the strained ambivalence of the *sign's* connection' with its signified, a distancing which, according to Kristeva, gave rise to the increasingly material nature of the signifying unit (the sign), and to fragmentation and heterogeneity.<sup>45</sup> As Kay points out:

R. Howard Bloch's *Etymologies and Genealogies* would locate it [the transition from symbol to sign] earlier. He portrays the *chansons de geste* as adhering to a view of language in which there is an immediate bond between word and meaning, and between words and their origins, so that discourse is 'symbolic' in the sense that it has a quasi-participatory relationship to its referent. With courtly literature comes a greater awareness of the materiality of the signifier, its arbitrariness and capacity for play: romance writing attests, then, the development from 'symbol' to 'sign'.<sup>46</sup>

Contrary to Kristeva, whose thesis emphasises the diachronic focus of the symbol-sign transition, Bloch's perception of it as a development relating to genre assigns it more particularly to the synchronic, although in both cases the move from symbol to sign would imply both diachronic and synchronic, vertical and horizontal elements of change and development. In both cases, however, it is the openness of the sign to heterogeneity and polyvalence which stands in marked contrast to the closed self-perpetuation of the symbol.

The relation of this semiotic theory to the text of *Raoul de Cambrai* hinges on the instability of narrative and character which the song displays. It is important at this point to differentiate between instability and incoherence. The patterning of narrative elements in *Raoul* provides textual form and structure: the interplay between narrative and counter-narrative, the resurgence of motifs, the catalytic properties of violence, the

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<sup>44</sup> Kristeva, 'From Symbol to Sign', p. 65.

<sup>45</sup> Kristeva, 'From Symbol to Sign', p. 66.

<sup>46</sup> Kay, *The 'Chansons de geste'*, pp. 37-38.

role of narrative memory, are all features which serve to produce an overall coherency of structure. This may be viewed as relating primarily to the form of the narrative, as opposed to its substance, yet *Raoul*, within each of its separate manuscripts, does also project a coherency of narrative substance, based on thematic linearity and progression. It cannot be said that the *chanson* is without its inconsistencies, for the many possible *remaniements* and scribal copying inevitably work to produce a varying manuscript tradition which lays itself open to modern criticism and contention.<sup>47</sup> Yet, overall, *Raoul* does present an accessible plot, whose elements are inter-related throughout the *récit*; it has an essential literary coherence and comprehensibility. Kay's comment on the increasing narrative instability of *Raoul* and of its tendency towards shift and *mouvance* is nonetheless apposite. As posited above, this instability relates to the structuring of social relations -- feudalism, companionship, and the family -- and also to the portrayal of character and the definition of cultural and linguistic concepts (for example legitimacy and illegitimacy).

The symbolic quality of *Raoul de Cambrai*, 'symbolic' here being the semiotic term as employed by Kristeva and by Bloch, lies in the representative function of its characters. For Kay, *Raoul* is:

Invoked not as a character within a plot, but as an instance of madness, atrocity, or pride -- a vivid impression of violence, and thus a kind of literary shorthand for it, rather than as a fixed and coherent narrative. This lack of fixity does not help to determine how 'history' becomes 'poetry', but it does contribute to the picture of a popular imaginary (the legendary?) in which image predominates over textuality.<sup>48</sup>

This perception of *Raoul* as a symbol, or signifier, of violence, transmitted from the imaginary to the text, finds a parallel in Kristeva's linkage of the universal and the mythical with the symbol:

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<sup>47</sup> See Kay, *Raoul*, Introduction, pp. lix-lx.

<sup>48</sup> Kay, *Raoul*, Introduction, p. lxi.



Mythical thought operates within the sphere of the symbol (as in the epic, folk tales, *chansons de geste*, etc.) through symbolic units that are *units of restriction* in relation to the symbolized universals ('heroism', 'courage', 'nobility', 'virtue', 'fear', 'treason', etc.).<sup>49</sup>

Kristeva's allocation of the *chanson de geste* to the realm of the symbol agrees with Bloch's reading of the genre, but the world presented by *Raoul de Cambrai* cannot be defined as unambiguous or monologic. The heterogeneity and fragmentation of narrative and of its possible interpretations pulls in the opposite direction, towards the sign and its plurality of representation. The self-reproductive quality of the symbol participates in the construction of the physical world and in the continuity of its concentration on violence and warfare. The destabilisation that this violence implies, however, and the slippage of society and its representatives from a discourse and an ontology of legitimacy into one of illegitimacy, refers forwards to the economy of the sign and its incorporation of the negative and the ambiguous.<sup>50</sup> *Raoul de Cambrai* has been the focus of considerable criticism, particularly in regard to its continuation, *RII*, for its alleged 'contamination' by romance elements. Kay argues convincingly against these claims, yet it is perhaps useful to recall the parallel drawn by Bloch between the sign as signifying device and the romance.<sup>51</sup> He points to the problematising and disruption of linearity and the notion of origins in the later *chansons de geste*:

It is, in fact, in the earliest *chansons de geste* that the aesthetic consequences of the genealogical paradigm are most operative. Many epics from the late twelfth century onward tend both to thematize a certain tension among consanguinal relations and to lose their generic specificity.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Kristeva, 'From Symbol to Sign', pp. 64-65.

<sup>50</sup> Kristeva sees the sign as introducing negativity and alterity: 'a monovalent (symbolic) structure is replaced with a heterovalent, broken, double structure' ('From Symbol to Sign', p. 67).

<sup>51</sup> Kay states on this point: 'It would probably be more accurate, then, to redescribe what were earlier identified as 'romance' elements as elements arising from an epic counter-narrative. They represent less the intrusion of another genre than the processing and recycling of the results of the violence inherent in the *chansons de geste* themselves. *Raoul de Cambrai* is thus a network of reflections of, commentaries on, and products of its own poetic material' (*Raoul*, Introduction, p. lxxii).

<sup>52</sup> Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*, p. 174.

The fixing of the text of *Raoul de Cambrai* at a point of considerable social and cultural change, the beginning of the thirteenth century, during the period which saw the synchronic existence and inter-relation of the *chanson de geste* and the romance, relates it both to Kristeva's chronological focus, and to Bloch's notion of the division between symbol to sign as relating to genre. The possibility of romance influence on *Raoul* could thus be seen as open to question. If not as a straightforward narrative adoption of romance topoi or motifs, this influence could be read as stemming from the inter-relation and tension generated between the epic and the romance, between the symbol and the sign, at the beginning of a transition between the two. The considerable tension which the *chanson* encapsulates could then be read not only as aspect and product of its own generic paradigm, but also of its chronological positioning during a period of economic, political, and literary transition, at the point of tension between symbol and sign.

#### ILLEGITIMACY AND DEATH

The slippage between legitimacy and illegitimacy in *Raoul* may be read as symptomatic of the fluidity of text and narrative, yet the terms themselves are seen to be inherently unstable, their definition and applicability consistently opened up to reinterpretation. The initial opposition set up between Raoul and Bernier -- Raoul as legal heir to Raoul Taillefer, Bernier as a bastard with no legal claim to inheritance -- positions them as emblematic figures, representatives and inheritors of a particular ideological and cultural dichotomy. The expected corollary of this opposition, the equating of legitimacy with goodness, and illegitimacy with evil, does, however, operate at no point within the text. As seen at the beginning of this chapter, modern critical interpretation has rather inferred the opposite, as with Calin's moralised polarisation of

the two families.<sup>53</sup> Legitimacy of birth is not, then, viewed as a prime constituent of moral quality, either in the textual context, or in the audience's (at least the modern audience's) interpretation. This disconnection works to undercut and to destabilise the inherent meaning and measurability of 'legitimacy' as a value-concept. Its function as signifier of a universal (to use Kristeva's term), a symbol with an acknowledged and quantifiable meaning, is opened up to a heterogeneity and ambiguity which allows its use as a linguistic term and as a signifying concept greater play of interpretation.

Although his legitimacy of birth is in no way presented as questionable, the narrative's problematising of Raoul's moral or social legitimacy is marked early in the tale. Following a rejection by King Louis of his request for the restitution of the Cambrésis, Raoul's uncle Guerri finds the young man playing chess:

As eschés joue Raous de Cambrizis  
 si con li hom qi mal n'i entendi:  
 Gueris le voit, par le bras le saisi,  
 son peliçon li desront et parti.  
 'Fil a putain', le clama -- si menti --  
 'malvais lechieres, por qoi joes tu ci?  
 N'as tant de terre, par verté le te dï,  
 ou tu peüses conreer un ronci'. (ll. 482-89)

The epithet 'fil a putain' is signalled as untrue by the narratorial voice, yet the actual extent of this 'untruth' is debatable. Aalais may not be a whore, the accusation thrown at Bernier's mother by Raoul (ll. 1151-58), yet the narrative's inscription of her son as illegitimate in terms other than those of paternity and legal marriage is one which is increasingly underscored as the tale progresses. Raoul's rejection of ancestral

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<sup>53</sup> Calin also states that the family which stands in unity (i.e. Bernier's) is marked as positive, while the disunited family (Raoul's) is an image of wickedness. This would appear an oversimplification, for Bernier's family is not depicted as forming a coherent unit -- Bernier initially has little contact with either parent, neither of whom has contact or relations with the other. If the 'family' is viewed essentially that of the father, and Calin thus refers to the relationship between Ybert and Bernier, the situation is not improved, for Bernier (although equivocal on this point) fights against his father and uncles. The family can only be considered 'united' following Marsent's death and Bernier's breaking with Raoul (Laisse LXXXIV). As far as the family of the Cambrésiens is concerned, the depiction of its individual members would seem much more nuanced and individualised than Calin's statement would imply: see Calin, *The Old French Epic of Revolt*, p. 177.

inheritance and memory has been indicated above, his desire to pursue the fief of the Vermandois rather than attempting to regain the Cambrésis presenting an instance of choice in which the morally illegitimate is privileged over the legitimate.<sup>54</sup> Calin says of Raoul:

His is the tragedy of disinheritence, the persecuted orphan suffering from an impression of inferiority, torn by an unquenchable thirst for power and respectability which he ought to have possessed from the family legacy but which has been denied him.<sup>55</sup>

This view of the hero would seem to depict him as a figure entirely subject to an external fate, struggling against circumstances beyond his control, and motivated by an uncontrollable impetus. Although partially true in regard to Raoul's youth, as his initial orphaning and disinheritance prove the catalyst for future events, this perception of the ties that bind him appears to preclude the notion of Raoul's own rational choice. The impetus of his character is towards violence; as signalled by the narrator's comment, the potential for Raoul to become the ideal knight and vassal is marred by his rashness:

S'en lui n'eüst un poi de desmesure  
mieudres vasals ne tint onques droiture,  
mais de ce fu molt pesans l'aventure:  
hom desreez a molt grant painne dure. (ll. 320-23)

The element of choice is, however, of prime importance in the delineation of Raoul's character in the text. Although feudal disharmony is already rife, due to the actions of Louis, it is Raoul's acting out of his own personal desires and his exercising of free will which causes the breakdown of the coherent family structure and the destruction

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<sup>54</sup> It should be noted that nowhere does the 'maternal' domain of Cambrai come into question -- this is not Louis' to bestow. Louis' actions as patriarch, assigning the paternal lands of the Cambrésis and the Vermandois away from the maternal holding, could, however, be seen as the breaking of a 'natural' bond -- the Cambrésis is split from Cambrai; Raoul from Aalais. The conflict and violence of *Raoul* could then be seen as a manifestation and consequence of the rift between the paternal and the maternal brought about by the transcendent patriarchy, the *nom-du-père*, itself.

<sup>55</sup> Calin, *The Old French Epic of Revolt*, p. 115.

of the bonds of feudal companionship and personal friendship. Raoul may be projected as an uncontained, and uncontainable, source of violence operating within the structure of the text, yet it is the element of reason and choice inherent in his actions which ultimately marks him as a fallen hero. His *desmesure* cannot be the only motivation behind his destructive actions, or the moral tone of the tale would lose much of its innate force, and Raoul himself would be reduced to an image of incoherent, irrational obsession. As pointed out by Calin, the sphere of the *chanson de geste* is one of universalised moralisation:

The social or political aspect of man's nature is enlarged almost automatically to include the moral one, an all-inclusive conceptualized view of man as an agent entrusted with certain rights and bound by certain duties.<sup>56</sup>

Most importantly, in terms of Raoul's ultimate alienation from the established order of society and text, his disruption of the normative frame of relationships is not bounded and contained by the secular sphere. The disruptive force, the inherent violence, of Raoul's character is such that its passage from the secular to the religious appears inevitable. The motivations and actions which cause his alienation from family and society gain impetus as the narrative progresses. Having broken apart the bonds of the secular world, Raoul's disruptive force is projected onward and upward, to produce the ultimate alienation of the Christian Middle Ages -- that of man from God.

Raoul's rebellion against God has been remarked by many critics: Leupin sees Raoul's defiance of Louis, through his insistence on claiming the Vermandois, as an initial transgression of the theological order which invests the king with absolute sovereignty; Matarasso views his distancing from God as becoming more pronounced as the narrative progresses; while both Calin and Leupin list the successive actions

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<sup>56</sup> Calin, *The Old French Epic of Revolt*, p. 113.

which bring about this alienation from the divine order.<sup>57</sup> The culmination of Raoul's blasphemy and desecration finds expression in his invasion of the lands of the Vermandois and his attack on the nunnery at Origny, where Bernier's mother is abbess, his army's veneration of the holy place providing a marked contrast to Raoul's total lack of Christian identification. Raoul's own words place him beyond the point of blasphemy:

Mon tré tendez em mi liu del mostier  
et en ces porches esseront mi sonmier;  
dedans les creutes conreés mon mangier;  
sor les crois d'or seront mi esprevier;  
devant l'autel faites aparillier  
un riche lit ou me volrai couchier;  
au crucefis me volrai apuier  
et les nonnains prendront mi esquier. (ll. 1058-65)

The restraint of his army, even the most warlike and foolish of them, then underscores Raoul's otherness, his going beyond the bounds of the moral order which the text both erects and pronounces as valid:

Li Saint sonnerent sus el maistre mostier,  
de Dieu lor menbre le pere droiturier;  
tos les plus fox convint a souploier:  
ne vossent pas le corsaint empirier. (ll. 1074-78)

Although the sinful nature of Raoul's conduct is signalled both by Guerri (ll. 1100-02) and by Marsent (ll. 1127-29), his impetus to destruction and desecration continues, the subsequent firing of the nunnery and the death of Marsent (*Laisses* LXIX-LXXI) transferring intention to action. 'Raoul is above all a defier of God; in such theocentric times, his defiance amounts to signing his own death warrant'.<sup>58</sup> The defiance of God and the transgressing of the divine code thus parallels and exceeds the breaking of the bonds which structure and unite feudal relations and the family.

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<sup>57</sup> Leupin, 'The Illegitimacy of Writing', p. 137; Matarasso, *Recherches historiques*, p. 205; Calin, *A Muse for Heroes*, p. 54.

<sup>58</sup> Leupin, 'The Illegitimacy of Writing', p. 137.



Raoul is marked by death in all three contexts, feudal, familial, and religious: invested with death as he is granted the fief of the Vermandois (ll. 829-31); cursed with death by his mother (ll. 953-57); and warned of the brief life that awaits the defier of God (ll. 1100-02). His self-transposition from the sphere of legitimacy to that of moral and spiritual illegitimacy inevitably links him with death; a death which is then itself rendered ambiguous by the manner of its textual marking. As pointed out by Kay: 'Cursed by his mother, sacrilegious and blasphemous, Raoul seems an obvious candidate for divine retribution, and yet his actual death is presented in almost wholly secular terms'.<sup>59</sup> Divine judgement appears suspended, as the narrative inscribes Raoul as posthumous hero, his heart greater than that of Jehan de Pontiu, the largest knight in the opposing army, slain in battle by Raoul:

l'uns fu petiz, ausi con d'un effant;  
 et li Raoul, ce sevent li auquant,  
 fu asez graindres, par le mien esciant,  
 qe d'un torel a charue traiant. (ll. 3064-67)

Raoul's bravery and heroic quality appear incontrovertible, unmarred, at this point at least, by his *desmesure* and lack of respect for the religious and secular orders. Likewise, the blame for his death is not apportioned to any one person or source. The extent to which Raoul himself is exonerated from blame, and the attribution of guilt to Aalais (for her curse) and to Bernier (for wielding the death-blow), are left ambiguous and open-ended.<sup>60</sup> The categories of interpretation and of judgement are revealed as open to a considerable amount of play. Raoul's slippage from legitimacy to illegitimacy may be read into the text, yet the bounds and representative value of these concepts are themselves inherently unstable, their meaning open to narrative flux and

<sup>59</sup> Kay, 'The Character of Character', p. 487.

<sup>60</sup> There can be no real attribution of blame to Bernier, for he kills Raoul in open battle, in a fair fight. Bernier does grieve for Raoul and regret his death, but it is Guerri who apportions blame to Bernier, killing him in revenge (ll. 8222-33). Note that there is no parallel between the two episodes, as Guerri hits Bernier from behind with a stirrup.

change. If narrative character may not be delineated in a stable and fixed way, blocked into and framed by a set of concepts with universal and coherent meaning, how may it be read? It is perhaps only when the characters of the narrative are considered against one other, in relation to their active and reactive function and to the themes and topoi which structure the *chanson*, that the positioning of character and its significance in the textual framework becomes more clearly apparent.

If Raoul is seen to shift from partaking in a discourse of legitimacy to its opposite, despite the legal legitimacy of his birth, what then of Bernier, who would initially appear to be the most evidently illegitimate character? Although Bernier's legal bastardy is regularly mentioned by the other characters and by narratorial comment, his noble appearance and knightly qualities are also frequently underscored, such as at his knighting ceremony:

Des qe Berniers fu el destrier monte(r)z  
a grant mervelle par fu biax adoubez.  
L'escu saisi qi fu a or bendez  
et prent l'espieu qi bien fu acerez,  
le confanon a .v. clox d'or fermez;  
fait un eslais, si s'en est retornez.  
Emmi la place fu molt grans li barnez;  
dist l'uns a l'autre, 'Cis est molt bel armez;  
encor ne soit de mollier espousez,  
c'est grans et riches ces noble parentez'. (ll. 409-18)

Family and lineage would here appear to take precedence over legitimacy of birth; Bernier is incorporated into the genealogical frame and his position within it is accepted as valid. Yet Bernier's own intrinsic worth is clearly marked both by the other characters and by his function as textual counterpoint to Raoul. In the midst of battle, Gautier asks, of Bernier: 'Qi est cis hom qe ci samble baron?', (l. 3777), and on Louis' announcement that he will give the Vermandois to a prince after Ybert's death, the response is unequivocal: 'Dist Ybers, 'Sire, bien fait a otroier; / a Berneçon

la donnai des l'autrier', (ll. 5218-19).<sup>61</sup> Bernier's appearance and actions reflect his quality; his birth to noble parents (a fact which he underlines himself, ll. 1491-1508; ll. 5548-51) imbues him with an nobility of character which is not negated by his bastardy. In addition, he fulfils all the criteria of social and moral legitimacy which Raoul does not. In regard to the bonds of loyalty and companionship which structure feudal relations he supports Raoul as his lord and friend, although decrying the destructive nature of his actions. Bernier's bond with his mother is close and loving, while his relationship with his father becomes harmonious once he breaks away from Raoul. Above all, however, it is Bernier's continuous veneration of God which most significantly marks his polarity with Raoul and his own ultimate legitimacy. In Bernier's own words:

Se je avoie le brun elme lacié,  
je combatroie a cheval ou a pié  
vers un franc home molt bien aparillié  
q'il n'est bastars c'il n'a Dieu renoié; (ll. 1528-31)

As Leupin states:

In God's eyes, then, illegitimacy does not count, and could not be imputed to Bernier; therefore, his character is the precise locus of a radical inversion affecting the dialectics of legitimacy and illegitimacy. Correlatively, if there is indeed a bastard in *Raoul de Cambrai*, it is the title character of the song, who radically refuses to respect the Christian faith.<sup>62</sup>

This legitimate/ illegitimate transposition of the two men is reflected in the narrative's strategies of genealogical continuation, as the lineage of Bernier assimilates and outlives that of Raoul. The death of Raoul and his nephew, Gautier, sees the end of

<sup>61</sup> In the *RII* section Bernier's innate nobility is validated by the insistence of Guerri's daughter on marrying him, despite his protestations of inequality of birth (5513-33).

<sup>62</sup> Leupin, 'The Illegitimacy of Writing', p. 139. The notion that illegitimacy is not an issue in *Raoul* conflicts with the ecclesiastical position at the time, which placed greater emphasis on legitimacy, the Church attempting to influence secular society in this direction. This may indicate that the late twelfth-century characterisation of Bernier stems from a reworking of earlier material, dating from a period when illegitimacy was more readily accepted by both Church and society. Kay, in *The 'Chansons de geste'*, suggests that anxiety over paternity appears more strongly in epic than in romance (p. 84), which again marks the 'legitimising' of Bernier as something of an anomaly.

the male line of the Cambrésiens, while the marriage of Bernier and Guerri's daughter, Beatrice, sees the absorption of its last remaining genealogical heir into the lineage of the Vermandois (ll. 5884-88). The birth of Bernier's two sons then recreates and extends his lineage in a form legitimate in all respects.<sup>63</sup>

It is Leupin's indication of the dialectic opened up between the two diametrically opposed terms which most clearly reflects the notion of the inherent instability of the semiotics, and therefore of the narrative, of *Raoul de Cambrai*. The inversion of the characters of Raoul and Bernier in relation to the legitimate/ illegitimate opposition does not serve to fix them as polarised signifiers any more than did their initial straightforward interpretation in terms of their legitimacy of birth. As pointed out by Kay, the depiction of their characters is inconsistent: 'In *Raoul de Cambrai*, the pacific Bernier occasionally rises to Raoul's implacable belligerence, while Raoul declines into moderation and goodwill'.<sup>64</sup> She adds the following explanation: 'In such scenes the author's conception of character is manifestly subordinate to his desire to expose the psychology of vendetta and reprobate the incessant renewal of strife'.<sup>65</sup> This emphasis on the never-ending warfare and violence of *Raoul* again returns the text to a seemingly unavoidable plunge into disruption and death. Even the death of Raoul in

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<sup>63</sup> Leupin has the following comment: 'The inheritors of meaning descend from the only male character who renounces neither theological nor feudal law, Bernier. Does this mean that as readers we can have access to the text only if we accept these laws? I think not. Instead, the text seems to say that among the many heirs who gloss over its meaning, it will eventually recognize its own. Moreover, the legacy of interpretation has nothing to do with the institution of any legitimacy, for the sons who survive the song of death are the only ones who originate from a lineage marked by Bernier's illegitimacy' ('The Illegitimacy of Writing', p. 151). This use of the term 'legitimacy' evidently refers solely to birth in wedlock, a usage which simplifies considerably the plurality of meaning inherent in the legitimate/ illegitimate opposition of *Raoul de Cambrai*.

<sup>64</sup> 'The Character of Character', p. 482. Kay then notes the interchange of roles during the embassy scenes, when firstly Raoul and later Bernier are against a peace accord (p. 483). Gaunt takes this idea further: 'If Raoul and Bernier exchange roles, the symmetry with which this happens and the moral ambivalence of each position, makes them interchangeable. Raoul becomes Bernier, Bernier becomes Raoul' (*Gender and Genre*, p. 61). This interpretation would, however, seem to push their intrinsic similarity too far, particularly since Gaunt then goes on to point to the fact that it is 'the potential threat of difference' which is realised in the killing of Raoul by Bernier (p. 61).

<sup>65</sup> Kay, 'The Character of Character', p. 483.

battle does not serve to eradicate the violence, for its repercussions remain until the fight can be initiated once again by Raoul's textual heir, his nephew, Gautier.

### SUBSTITUTION

The disappearance of Raoul from the tale does not dissipate his force as a symbol of violence. The void which he leaves is filled by the impression of this violence, a force which leads to the resurgence and repatterning of motifs which signal a return to warfare and bloodshed. This renewal of the feud between the Cambrésiens and the Vermandois is to a great extent due to the actions of Aalais, whose desire for family vengeance now appears as further manifestation of her family loyalty. The narrative's plunge into warfare may have been initially instigated by Raoul, yet the characters who remain to function actively in the narrative are now pulled into the vortex which he has left. As considered above, it is Aalais who is most evidently seen to uphold the orders which structure society, ideally providing coherence and stability of monarchical rule, and feudal and familial relations. It is her adherence to the family, to blood and to lineage, rather than purely to her son, which is manifested in Aalais' substitution of her daughter's son, Gautier, for Raoul following his death. The text's inscription of Gautier in place of Raoul could be read as a desire for the continuation of the lineage, as the patrilineage of Raoul Taillefer is ended with the death of his son, yet continuation and reduplication in *Raoul de Cambrai* are concepts more readily applied to the topos of violence itself than to any notion of family and lineage.

Although still a child, Gautier becomes heir to Aalais' land and potential avenger of his uncle's death (ll. 3420-25).<sup>66</sup> Gautier's embodying of family traits and his

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<sup>66</sup> This change of lordship conforms to the genealogical linearity of feudal inheritance, and thus creates no problems: 'En poi de terme est la terre aclinee' (l. 3471), yet it is unclear as to whether Aalais is referring to the Cambrésis at this point, or purely to Cambrai. See note 10 above for the

resemblance to Raoul are consistently marked by the text, an inscription which serves to validate the substitution in terms of the genealogical continuum. His replacing of Raoul is not, however, simply confined to a substitution of one for the other as heir to land and position, for Gautier appears as a reduplication of and physical replacement for his dead uncle, a form of substitution which appears to answer Aalais' desire for a son who will act as an integral family member. Aalais voices this inscription of Gautier into Raoul's place in no uncertain terms:

Dame Aalais commence a larmoier  
 tout por son fil qe ele avoit tant chier:  
 en liu de lui ont restoré Gautier. (ll. 3645-67)<sup>67</sup>

Although a more viable prospect as a son than Raoul, in that he appears to lack his uncle's innately damning quality of *desmesure* and is able to function within the confines of the Cambrésien family structure, Gautier's substitution does not lead to the continuation of the lineage. Genealogical progression is suppressed, subordinated to the narrative's continuum of violence which will eventually lead to Gautier's death in battle (ll. 8491-96). The replacement of Raoul does not signal an extension of the lineage, through the physical substitution of Gautier, but the re-animation of the destructive force which Raoul symbolises. Integral to the text, it is the topos of violence which appears self-renewing and self-perpetuating, in contrast to the falling away and death of genealogical linearity.

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distinction which Kay draws between the two. Gautier and his mother travel to the Cambrésis to see Aalais (l. 3426), yet this fief is not Aalais' to give away. In addition, the dispossession of Giboin le Mancel would seem to create a problem which is neither featured nor resolved by the text. It would thus seem most probable that, in line with Kay's reading of the text, the land which Aalais bequeaths to Gautier is that of Cambrai, a holding which belongs to her in its entirety, rather than being land which is held in fief from the king. Gautier swears an oath of vengeance on Raoul's death bier: 'Mais par les sains qe Jhesu ont proié, / se je tant vif q'aie l'elme lacié, / ne te larai n'en donjon n'en plaisié / n'en forteresce dusq'a Paris au sié, / si t'averai le cuer del pis sachié, / en cent parties fendu et peçoié!' (ll. 3441-47).

<sup>67</sup> In addition, Gautier is marked as having inherited the family qualities (l. 3660), and Aalais later asks Guerri whether the newly-knighted Gautier has taken her son's place in terms of his ability to fight (ll. 3925-27).



## THE MATERNAL SPACE

The threat inherent in Gautier's substitution for Raoul is underscored by narratorial prediction, voiced immediately following Raoul's burial:

Une grant piece covint puis detrier  
ceste grant guerre dont m'oés ci plaidier,  
mais Gautelés la refist commencier:  
tantost con pot monter sor son destrier,  
porter les armes, son escu manoir,  
molt se pena de son oncle vengier.  
Des or croist guere Loeys et Bernier,  
Wedon de Roie et Ybert le guerier;  
tout le plus cointe en convint essillier. (ll. 3552-60)

The threat to the life of Bernier, as slayer of Raoul, is extended and universalised, the impetus generated by the vendetta signalled as overwhelming and uncontainable. Although the return to a state of warfare is attributed to Gautier in the above quotation, it is in fact Aalais who re-animates the latent threat.<sup>68</sup> In a scene which parallels Guerri's spurring-on of Raoul (ll. 482-89), Aalais accuses Gautier of neglecting his duty:

Gautelet a en la place trové;  
as effans joe, q'i forment l'ont amé.  
La dame l'a a son gant asené  
et il i vint de bone volonté.  
'Biax niés', dist ele, 'or sai de verité,  
Raoul vostre oncle aveiz tout oublié,  
son vaselaige et sa nobilité'. (ll. 3568-74)

The fact that this instigation to violence occurs 'A un haut jor de la Nativité' (l. 3564) on Aalais' exit from the church service implicitly underscores its moral illegitimacy;

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<sup>68</sup> Régine Colliot sees this type of instigatory action as indicating a conflict between generations: 'Le combat sans merci des jeunes est presque toujours déclenché par les exhortations des gens d'âge, excitant avec un entêtement tragique les adolescents à combattre jusqu'à la mort [...] Le conflit des générations est donc un des grands ressorts de cette action si lourde de guerres et de morts. Et l'existence des jeunes enfants est orientée définitivement par leurs aînés' ('Enfants et enfance dans *Raoul de Cambrai*', in *L'Enfance au Moyen Age: Senefiance*, 9 (1980), pp. 233-52 (p. 238) ).

the sanctity of Christ's birth and the simplicity of childish games are displaced by a return to warfare. The role which Aalais adopts here, that of instigator of male violence, is illustrative of the gender positioning and function of women in the epic. Aalais' role in the narrative is not bounded purely by her maternal function, or even by her depiction as passive supporter of the masculine order of society and text. She is rather inscribed as an active catalyst of narrative progression, who incites men to action through her speech.<sup>69</sup> At the sight of Bernier dining with Louis her outburst is at once a criticism of the monarchy, an instigation to violence, and an appeal to Louis as a member of the family, as uncle to Raoul:

'Fui de ci, rois, tu aies encombrier!  
 Tu ne deüses pas regne justicier!  
 Se je fuse hom, ains le sollelg couchier  
 te mosteroie a l'espee d'acier  
 q'a tort ies rois, bien le pues afichier,  
 qant celui laises a ta table mengier  
 qi ton neveu fist les menbres trenchier'. (ll. 5044-50)

This instance sees the pulling together of the threads which animate the character of Aalais, and which illustrate her narrative function. She is at once a critic of the monarchy in its present form, a proponent of aggression, and an embodiment of family loyalty and vengeance. Aalais' role as instigator and catalyst of violence following Raoul's death, does, however, mark her divergence from the epic topos of female aggression outlined by Kimberlee Campbell.<sup>70</sup> The reactive nature of the aggression which Campbell describes, in which women's function is to maintain the *status quo*, social coherence and stability, would apply more readily to Aalais prior to her son's death. Her desire for vengeance is a reaction against the loss of Raoul, yet the slippage from a discourse of re-establishment to one of destruction marks her passage from reaction to action. Despite this, the weapons which Aalais employs are

<sup>69</sup> Gaunt sees this type of female narrative input as indicative of the fact that: 'the genre's monologic construction of masculinity is a fragile edifice [...] the most powerful signal that all is not well in the epic's all-male club is the inclusion of women characters in many texts as protagonists who partake in and sometimes direct the action' (*Gender and Genre*, p. 62).

<sup>70</sup> Campbell, 'Fighting Back', pp. 248-49. See Chapter 3 above for further details.

words, and the force of her aggression must be channelled through men. The reactive female voice is inscribed and marked by the written word of the text, but in the narrative context the intangible nature of this female speech is opposed to the all-too-tangible physicality of male weaponry.<sup>71</sup> The two are entirely different, although allied in their aim, and Aalais' words to Louis -- 'Se je fuse hom' (l. 5046) -- signal her recognition of this disparity. She is bounded and limited by the social norms that govern female activity within this narrative, and in the genre as a whole. These norms internal to the narrative are subject to the modifications and reversals produced by *Raoul's* vision of character, while those external form part of a broader horizon of expectation. Despite the depiction of Aalais as active participant in the development of plot and narrative, the marking of her character and voice as feminine ultimately, although not without a struggle, confines her narrative input to this voice, leaving physical vengeance to be acted out by the male representatives of the lineage.

Aalais' inscription into the text as upholder of the masculine order, and the catalytic force to violent action which she exerts, would potentially seem to allow her a prime place and function within the narrative structure; a significance and influence predicated on her existence as mother. The persuasion which she attempts to exert over Raoul is certainly based on her privileged position as his mother, and her subsequent influence in the feud following his death stems both from her symbolic positioning as feudal matriarch and from the maternal nature of her relationship with Gautier. If the textual privileging of Aalais and the potential power of her influence over the male members of the lineage stems from this motherhood, then how does this relate to the significance and positioning of the father in *Raoul de Cambrai*? The father

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<sup>71</sup> The only point at which Aalais does take up a weapon is when she finds Bernier lying wounded following his wounding of Gautier. Her weapons are not, however, those of a *chevalier* -- she attacks Bernier with a club (ll. 5061-64). Rather than symptomatic of her sex, this may, however, be seen as owing to the improvised nature of the assault -- cf. Guillaume d'Orange in the *Prise d'Orange*, or to the fact that she is not a knight -- cf. Roland's choice of a club over a sword because he is not yet knighted in *Aspremont*.

of Raoul is written out of the narrative close to the beginning (ll. 28-29), yet, as Leupin states: 'Above all, this text is a truly monumental effort at thinking the locus of the dead father in both symbolic and real senses'.<sup>72</sup> The dead father, Raoul Taillefer, is not eradicated from the text. As with the characters of Raoul and Marsent, the gap left by his absence is imbued with a significance which resonates through narrative and action. His memory is sustained by the remaining characters who circumscribe and retain his locus, his symbolic positioning, as father.<sup>73</sup>

This continuing significance of the paternal in *Raoul*, is, however, rejected by the son, whose self-dislocation from the heritage of the father goes beyond an act of will, and marks a step towards bastardy. The surrogate father-figures of the text, Louis and Guerri, are equally rejected, or, in the case of Louis, do the rejecting. The failure of either to live up to the paternal ideal leads to their failure to be inscribed into the locus of the father, to take up his symbolic position in the reproductive structure of the text. This ultimate lack of a valid father-figure leads Leupin to indicate a split between the symbolic and the real father: 'the fact that no one in the song is equal to the status of paternity shows us that the father in question is actually the Name-of-the-Father, and not the real or biological father'.<sup>74</sup> The Name-of-the-Father, as 'the "paternal metaphor" that inheres in symbolization', is linked by Leupin with the right to inherit.<sup>75</sup> By invoking the Name-of-the-Father, Leupin ties his theory about the nature of text in *Raoul* in with the Lacanian Symbolic, in which the son accedes to the paternal inheritance of the phallus, his gender affirmed as he is positioned within the

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<sup>72</sup> Leupin, 'The Illegitimacy of Writing', p. 134.

<sup>73</sup> This sustaining of memory is seen by Colliot as providing the instigatory force behind the narrative's action: 'Dans tous ces cas le souvenir engendre fatalement la vengeance, le combat, et se confond avec eux' ('Enfants et enfance', p. 251).

<sup>74</sup> Leupin, 'The Illegitimacy of Writing', p. 134. The 'Name-of-the-Father' is: 'the symbol of an authority at once legislative and punitive. It represented, within the Symbolic, that which made the Symbolic possible -- all those agencies that placed enduring restrictions on the infant's desire and threatened to punish, by castration, infringements of their law' (Malcolm Bowie, *Lacan* (London: Fontana, 1991), p. 108).

<sup>75</sup> Bowie, *Lacan*, p. 109.

structure of language. As Judith Butler explains: 'The Symbolic order creates cultural intelligibility through the mutually exclusive positions of "having" the Phallus (the position of men) and "being" the Phallus (the paradoxical position of women)'.<sup>76</sup> According to Leupin, then, Raoul's right to inheritance is the right to succeed to the phallus, but it is this paternal inheritance which Raoul is seen to reject. If the locus of the father remains purely in the Symbolic, and paternal significance is not recognised by Raoul, then Leupin's subsequent identification of the text's complete lack of paternal discourse would appear to follow: 'no one seems able to impose a discourse of "paternal" wisdom; with little exception, all the characters invest themselves with the origin of meaning, and almost all of them are "children"'.<sup>77</sup> Yet the possibility for a denial of the Name-of-the-Father is eminently debatable. Since it is, according to Lacan, the Law-of-the-Father which structures the Symbolic, such a denial would preclude the subject's entry into the Symbolic.<sup>78</sup> Although Raoul may reject the symbolic father, the father as signifier of the patriarchal order and of patrilinearity, represented by his physical inheritance -- the fief, he cannot ultimately deny the Name-of-the-Father, as Leupin suggests, for it is already invested in him.<sup>79</sup>

Although removing himself from the patrilinear context by renouncing the land which represents the father, and by rejecting the mother who speaks from a position within the patriarchal order of society and text, Raoul's ambivalence towards the paternal is

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<sup>76</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 44.

<sup>77</sup> Leupin, 'The Illegitimacy of Writing', p. 138.

<sup>78</sup> 'According to Lacan, the paternal law structures all linguistic signification, termed "the Symbolic", and so becomes a universal organizing principle of culture itself. This law creates the possibility of a meaningful language and, hence, meaningful experience through the repression of primary libidinal drives, including the radical dependency of the child on the maternal body [...] The "subject" who emerges as a consequence of this repression becomes a bearer or proponent of this repressive law' (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 79).

<sup>79</sup> Leupin sees the denial of the place of the father, that is, the renunciation of the paternal heritage, as being an investiture by death ('The Illegitimacy of Writing', p. 137), yet, as suggested by Baudrillard, it is rather the symbolic (Lacan's Symbolic) which equates with death, or at least with a haunting by death. He adds: 'Even psychoanalysis gravitates around this haunting, which it fends off while at the same time circumscribing it within an individualised unconscious, thus reducing it, under the Law of the Father, to the obsessional fear of castration and the Signifier' (*Symbolic Exchange and Death*, p. 1).

revealed through his identification with his own father. At a crucial point in the fight against Jehan de Pontiu he is inspired by the thought and the inherited memory of Raoul Taillefer:

Raous l'esgarde qant le va avisant:  
si grant le voit seoir sor l'auferrant  
por tout l'or Dieu n'alast il en avant,  
qant li remembre de Taillefer errant,  
qi fu ces peres ou tant ot hardemant.  
Qant l'en souvint, si prist hardement tant  
por quarante homes ne fuïst il de champ. (ll. 2563-69)

Rather than as real, human father, this image of Raoul Taillefer can be read as a further projection and doubling of the symbolic father, inscribed in memory not as a human being, but as a force for violence, suggested by his name -- Taillefer. The memory of Taillefer as symbol of knighthood and as warrior-father is not rejected in the same way by Raoul as is the father as symbol of patriarchy and the inheritance of the patrimony. Taillefer is invoked as an image of violence; an image for filial identification and inspiration. The locus and significance of the dead father in symbolic terms is thus a doubly imperative force in *Raoul de Cambrai* (as rejection and as identification), yet the fact the father must *be* dead in order to have a narrative resonance and impetus indicates the essential instability of the text's construction of the paternal. It is noteworthy that the father placed in diametric opposition to Raoul Taillefer, Ybert de Ribemont, does not carry the same weight and textual significance as Taillefer, despite his potentially greater narrative agency as a living character.

According to Kay:

The greater the investment of authority in the father or his symbolic equivalent, the likelier it is that symbolic representations (such as works of literature) will be grounded in a sense of origin (the father), in the privileging of presence over absence (the phallus), and in authority construed as dominance and control; whereas ambiguity and play will be



minimal and strictly regulated. Patriarchy, in other words, favours the monologic.<sup>80</sup>

The disquiet manifested by *Raoul de Cambrai* over the locus of the father and the paternal function marks the text as ambivalent in regard to the patriarchal structure itself. The focus and meaning of the text may be read as invested in the father, yet the play between legitimacy and illegitimacy, and the instability of sign and symbol opens the text up to a heterogeneity which fractures and disrupts any claim it may make to projecting the monologic discourse traditionally attributed to the *chanson de geste*.<sup>81</sup>

In contrast to the ambivalence of paternity and the paternal metaphor in *Raoul de Cambrai*, the depiction and function of its maternal characters appears stable and coherent within the framing structure of the narrative. Aalais fulfils her supportive function as epic matriarch, while Marsent, although a character whose possibility of interpretation appears split and dialogic, is intrinsically validated by the text in terms of her maternal role. Although neither mother is able to accede to the status of symbolic motherhood of other *chansons de geste* (*Aiol*, *Doon de la Roche*, and *Parise la Duchesse*) discussed by Kay, they are nonetheless, important as maternal elements in the strategies of reproduction which the text employs.<sup>82</sup> Their symbolic value as maternal signifiers, and their depiction as narrative characters, sees both women acknowledged as positive, despite the fact that Aalais does appear to pass on her fatal quality of *desmesure* to Raoul.<sup>83</sup> They are also both grounded within the *récit*, having

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<sup>80</sup> Kay, *The 'Chansons de geste'*, p. 81. Kay, however, points to the distribution of power between several father-figures in the *chanson de geste*. She therefore suggests, 'that in some ways subscription to patriarchy is less whole-hearted in the *chansons de geste* than in romances. The epic 'community' is more divided, and less univocal, than traditionally thought' (p. 83).

<sup>81</sup> 'The way the *chansons de geste* are traditionally depicted places them firmly in a patriarchal framework. The lineage, with its tracing of descent through successive generations of males, is seen as characterizing both form (the elaboration of family "cycles") and meaning which, obedient to the law of the father, embraces conformity and eschews private idiosyncrasy' (Kay, *The 'Chansons de geste'*, pp. 81-82).

<sup>82</sup> Kay, *The 'Chansons de geste'*, pp. 105-15.

<sup>83</sup> Matarasso points to the shared qualities of Aalais and Raoul: 'Aimante, passionnée, Aalais est essentiellement féminine. C'est le pendant féminin de son fils Raoul. Impulsive comme lui, elle se laisse emporter aussi facilement par la colère' (*Recherches historiques*, p. 234).

an input and a voice in the course of events, together with a narrative intensity to which only Raoul, of the male characters, can aspire. The role of Aalais, however, far exceeds that of Marsent as an agent present in the narrative. If Aalais is the maternal presence in the text, Marsent is the maternal absence, whose narrative significance, as Kay points out, is all the greater after her death.<sup>84</sup> Marsent then approaches the symbolic status and narrative resonance of Raoul Taillefer, yet it is her nature and prior inscription as living character, along with the manner of her death, which produce her continuing, and increasing, narrative power. In contrast, the power of the dead father is predicated on his symbolic function. He is firstly the focus and signifier of a dead patrilineage, and secondly the epitome of a chivalry which breathes its last in the course of the narrative which is *Raoul*.

If the mothers of the tale are seen to provide a form of focused narrative stability which the text otherwise lacks, then may the ambiguity and disquiet which troubles *Raoul de Cambrai* be read as concentrated on the instability and fracturing of the father-son relation, on the breaking down of a monologic paternal discourse? Although these strands of tension are certainly present in the text, there is, nonetheless, an inherent tension in the framing of maternal character in *Raoul*. This is not, however, based on a fracturing of either relations or discourse, but on the problematic framing of female character in terms of the body; the maternal confinement to the plasticity of the flesh.

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<sup>84</sup> Kay, *The 'Chansons de geste'*, p. 74.

The narrative role of Aalais and Marsent has been considered in regard to their construction and function as characters, read against the depiction of the male characters of *Raoul*. If, in place of this overall view of their narrative input and conformity to generic norms, they are instead read in terms of their maternal being, the tension inherent in the framing of the maternal characters of *Raoul* becomes evident. The symbolic value of the two women is marked as maternal, whether they are studied as elements in a reproductive textual matrix, or as signifiers in the semiotics of the text. The significance of this maternal marking inevitably influences their portrayal and reception as characters. It is the fact that both Aalais and Marsent are mothers, as opposed to non-maternal female characters, which provides them with a voice and a potential influence in the narrative.<sup>85</sup> In the case of Aalais, the force of her words propels the text into its repetition of all-consuming violence. In the case of Marsent her words are actively sought by her son. Both mothers, however, are over-ruled and their voices are suppressed, either by a countering verbal force (the Raoul-Aalais dispute) or by physical violence (Raoul's burning of the convent). This calls into question the type of framing strategy which the text employs, as it simultaneously delineates characters who appear imbued with narrative agency, and who are yet subject to a narrative force which suppresses and contains them. What then is the origin of this pull and tension?

Viewed specifically as mothers, the characters of Aalais and Marsent can be seen to have specific traits in common. In both cases their love for their son functions as

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<sup>85</sup> Although Marsent's potential influence over Raoul could be read as stemming from her religious importance as abbess, it is as mother to Bernier that she is insulted by Raoul (ll. 1151-58). His conception of her appears to be based on her presence and significance as mother, rather than as nun -- a view which parallels that of Bernier. The framing of her character by the text also privileges the maternal. Marsent's religious aspect thus appears intrinsic to her maternal and social validation, rather than an image with its own self-contained significance.

topos throughout the narrative. Aalais' restraining advice to Raoul has already been mentioned (ll. 816-22; 855-60), yet the terms in which this is couched set her discourse of diplomacy and reconciliation firmly within a maternal frame. The reasoning of her appeal for him to forgo an attack on the Vermandois is one of political expediency -- Raoul lacks adequate and dependable forces (ll. 832-33; 861-78) and his quest is, in any case, wrongful, contrary to the bonds dictated by the feudal system itself and by those of established friendship (ll. 817-20; 855-58). The tone of her speech, however, marks Aalais as emotional and subjective mother, rather than as objective advisor (although her advice is apt).<sup>86</sup> She first attempts to persuade Raoul with an appeal to memory and childhood love: 'Biax fix', dist ele, 'longement t'ai norri' (l. 811), her following words again refer to this topos of nurturing:

'Biax fix Raous', dist Aalais la bele,  
 'je te norri del lait de ma mamele.  
 Por qoi me fais dolor soz ma forcele? (ll. 826-28)

This conjuring-up of the primary mother-son bond may be read as portraying Aalais' deep love for Raoul, her emotive appeal desirous of drawing a similar response from him. In addition, the topos which frames her speech, maternal nurturing, links her to Kristeva's semiotic, where milk (along with tears) becomes 'les métaphores du non-langage, d'un "sémiotique" que la communication linguistique ne recouvre pas'.<sup>87</sup> In this context, milk and the maternal breast become non-verbal signifiers, representations of a maternal signified which is inevitably projected as diffuse and disjointed, broken into its bodily constituents and flows.<sup>88</sup> Cixous takes this a stage further, closer to language: 'Voice: milk that could go on forever. [...] Eternity: is

<sup>86</sup> Matarasso agrees on this point: 'Il est vrai que les objections qu'elle adresse à Raoul -- la force armée des fils d'Herbert, l'injustice de l'invasion, le peu de valeur des hommes d'Arouaise -- sont sensées, mais elles sont dictées par l'amour qu'elle lui porte' (*Recherches historiques*, p. 235).

<sup>87</sup> Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater', in *Histoires d'amour*, p. 312.

<sup>88</sup> This image of the fractured maternal body links with Luce Irigaray's theory of a female 'language' having its source in the female body. Located outside the patriarchal Symbolic, 'Irigaray's grounding signifier is the material (ultimately maternal) female body (albeit a body multiple, dispersed, with fluid boundaries)' (E. Anne Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 37).

voice mixed with milk'.<sup>89</sup> Maternal milk is here a *form* of feminine speech, rather than its metaphor, yet Cixous' eternal voice is still a voice without words; signifying the gendering of its 'speech' as feminine. Although such a gendering does not necessarily equate with inferiority, the placing of the female voice outside the realm of language marks it with a lack and incoherence which stems from its very confinement to the realm of the body, to materiality and, from the perspective of male-authored psychoanalysis, to a sphere of monologic stasis.<sup>90</sup> Aalais' self-reference to this discourse of the maternal, to the signifying value of milk and the breast, could be read as limiting her potential reach and influence in the masculine world of language and the Symbolic. Aalais appears grounded in representations of the body and its fractured, wordless discourse. Maternal speech becomes that *of* the maternal body, a reductionist move which appears as a fundamental problem in the work of such feminist theorists as Kristeva and Cixous, and yet which may also be read as a problem integral to the representation of the feminine in general.

E. Anne Kaplan sees this form of female essentialisation as a construction specifically elaborated in answer to the needs of the masculine symbolic order:

Irigaray and Cixous are often used to construct theories of female subversion via the female body per se, just because the female body is said to be 'beyond the phallus'. I rather see the female body (and in particular mother/ child bodies) as constructed by/ through the patriarchal Imaginary to fulfill specific patriarchal or capitalist needs.<sup>91</sup>

Although this reading may in itself be too invariable and closed an interpretation, it does point to the notion of the framing of the female body, of the female as body, as

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<sup>89</sup> Hélène Cixous and Christine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. by Betty Wing (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 78.

<sup>90</sup> This opposition of the heterologic and the monologic reappears in the definition of the Lacanian Symbolic: 'It is the realm of movement rather than fixity, and of heterogeneity rather than similarity. It is the realm of language, the unconscious and an otherness which remains other [...] Whereas the inhabitant of the Imaginary ventures into the world of others only to freeze, foreshorten and incorporate it, the Symbolic is inveterately intersubjective and social' (Bowie, *Lacan*, p. 92-93).

<sup>91</sup> Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation*, p. 39.

being a masculine construct. Within the narrative context of *Raoul de Cambrai*, it is this type of framing which can be seen to operate, constructing female character, and in particular maternal character, in corporeal terms, as feeding, nurturing, materiality and matter. This topos appears distinctly in Raoul's response to his mother's appeal:

'Maldehait ait -- je le taing por lanier --  
le gentil homme, qant il doit tornoier,  
a gentil dame qant se va consellier!  
dedans vos chambres vos alez aaisier,  
beviez puison por vo pance encraissier,  
et si pensez de boiwre et de mengier,  
car d'autre chose ne devez mais plaidier! (ll. 925-31)<sup>92</sup>

Female speech is here discounted, the function of women in the symbolic sphere of politics and warfare is discredited and annulled by the ultimate identification of the female with the sphere of the body. Raoul rejects his mother's call for him to identify with the primary, fusional bond of mother and son by attempting to exclude Aalais from the social world in which he operates, confining her instead to the sphere of an all-consuming corporeality. The constant dialectic present in the representation of the mother-figure is here invoked. The mother is either 'une idéalisation du narcissisme primaire', constructed in answer to male desire, or she is the mother as abject, splitting apart, loss, and, ultimately, fear.<sup>93</sup> It is this abject that Raoul rejects: 'It is a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as secure as it is stifling'.<sup>94</sup> Although speaking from a position which upholds the masculine order of feudal society within the narrative, the text's perception and delineation of Aalais' character would *appear* to be inevitably bounded by her ever-present motherhood. Yet the topos of the lactating, nurturing maternal body is one which she herself introduces (ll. 826-28, above). Her attempted manipulation of

<sup>92</sup> Colliot remarks: 'Les sentiments d'amour authentiques évoqués sont surtout ceux de fils à mères: union d'affection grandeuses, mais sincère malgré les disputes ('Enfants et enfance', p. 249). Although the bonds of affection are significant on the part of the mothers, the corresponding emotions of the two sons would appear to differ to a far greater extent, belying this reading.

<sup>93</sup> Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater', in *Histoires d'amour*, p. 295. For her use of the term 'abject' see *Powers of Horror*, pp. 1-31.

<sup>94</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 13.



Raoul by means of evoking the primary mother-son bond created by milk and nurturing signals the essential power of this bond, yet, within the masculine context of the *chanson*, its evocation simultaneously destabilises and threatens Aalais' position as matriarch.

This appreciable dialectic between active, decisive support of the masculine order and a potential inscription into a passive, corporeal femininity corresponds to the spirit/ body, form/ matter opposition considered previously. In this instance, however, the dialectical terms are seen to be embodied within a single narrative character, or rather, serve as her framing referents. Aalais, like Marsent, may be defined as a split subject, yet here the split is one of mind/ body, action/ passivity, rather than of spirit/ flesh. The point at which Aalais' aggressive support for, and defence of, the patrilineage does spill over into physical action, rather than remaining purely verbal, is indicative of this dialectical tension. Following the death of her son and the wounding of her nephew, both at the hands of Bernier, Aalais attempts to wound Bernier as he lies injured. She is initially prevented from harming him by the surrounding barons (ll. 5063-64), but it is then Bernier's own appeal to her maternal feeling which causes her to falter:

Et Berniers prent fors del lit a glacier;  
tot belement, sans plus de l'atargier,  
dame Aalais cort la ganbe enbracier,  
et le souler doucement a baisier.  
'Gentix contesce, plus ne vuel delaier!  
Vos me nouristes, se ne puis je noier,  
et me donnastes a boivre et a mengier. (ll. 5065-71)

Dame Aalais commence a larmoier --  
ne s'en tenist por les membres trenchier,  
qant Bernier voit si fort humelier. (ll. 5076-78)

Bernier's appeal to Aalais' memory parallels her own previous appeal to that of Raoul, yet now the invocation of the maternal bond finds its response.<sup>95</sup> Again, Aalais is identified with the topos of feeding and sustaining. Although here the reference is not to a nurturing with the body, with the maternal breast, the implicit recalling of Aalais' words to Raoul: 'je te norri del lait de ma mamele' (l. 827), sets up a discourse between the two episodes. Aalais' aggressive action, fuelled by familial loyalty, is countered by the very family memory which structures and drives so much of the narrative's action. The focus of memory at this point is, however, not aggression, but assimilation, as Bernier is linked to Aalais (although surrogately) through the bonds which Raoul renounces. The maternal feeling which drives Aalais to the desire for vengeance following Raoul's death paradoxically denies her the possibility of personally carrying out this revenge. Despite the text's suppression of Aalais, its pressing back into a discourse of the non- or pre-linguistic, a discourse of milk and tears signifying the maternal, the importance and ultimate undeniability of the mother is signalled by Bernier's words: 'Vos me nouristes, se ne puis je noier' (l. 5070). The bonds of maternal nurture cannot be denied at their basic level, however much they may be rejected in words. The presence of the mother is one which still makes itself felt, whether in denial -- as Aalais, or in death -- as Marsent.

Marsent's appearance within the temporal present of *Raoul de Cambrai* is in her role as nun, yet the maternal aspect of her character is not displaced. Although the narrative space devoted to her and to her interaction with other characters is much more limited than that of Aalais, Marsent's relationship with Bernier has a significance which parallels that of the Aalais-Raoul couple. The dialectics of the two relationships are, however, markedly different, the closeness and harmony of Marsent's relationship

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<sup>95</sup> Although the extent of Aalais' fostering of Bernier is unclear (ll.260-74, which treated this, are largely missing) it is apparent that he has been raised alongside Raoul from a young age.

with her son providing a decided contrast with the Aalais-Raoul pairing.<sup>96</sup> Like Aalais, Marsent's affection for her son is evident (ll. 1193-94 -- she kisses and embraces him), but this is a love which is clearly reciprocated. Bernier's positive image of his mother is considered above (ll. 1491-1516) and his love and respect for her are apparent in the interaction of mother and son. In contrast with Raoul, Bernier actively seeks his mother's counsel:

Berniers i vint, q'i molt fist a proisier,  
veïr sa mere Marsent o le vis fier.  
D'a li parler avoit molt grant mestier. (ll. 1187-89)

Although in a convent, Marsent is not excluded from the repercussions of the instability of the social world, as her continuing link with Bernier connects her inevitably with the sphere of feudal and family relations in which the other characters function. Marsent's motherhood is depicted as relevant and active. Her position as mother in the reproductive structure of the text and her evident function as such in the narrative therefore give an added dimension to Raoul's act of desecration, his burning of the nunnery at Origny. Not only a sin against God, this is also an active transgression of the feudal bond, a rejection of both the divine and the social order which is underscored by Marsent's dual inscription as nun and as mother. It is as mother that Bernier views Marsent, the sight of her burning body provoking a flood of remorse, self-blame and desire for revenge, underlining the strength of their maternal-filial tie:

lor dist li enfes: 'Molt grant folie qier --  
jamais secors ne li ara mestier.  
Ha, douce mere, vos me baisastes ier!  
En moi avez mout malvais iretier:  
je ne vos puis secore ne aidier  
Dex ait vostre arme q'i le mont doit jugier,

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<sup>96</sup> I would here disagree with Colliot, who sees the fact that Bernier is the product of a rape as leading to his rejection by Marsent: 'Ceci explique peut-être que Marsent n'ait pas élevé longtemps Bernier, ce mal-aimé, puisqu'elle à préféré devenir nonne' ('Enfants et enfance', p. 239). The narrative makes it quite apparent that it was Marsent's rejection of further marriage which caused her to take the veil and not her lack of love for her son (ll. 1515-16).

E Raous fel, Dex te doinst encombrer!  
 le tien homage avant porter ne qier;  
 se or ne puis ceste honte vengier,  
 je ne me pris le montant d'un denier'.  
 Tel duel demaine chiet li li brans d'acier --  
 troi foiz se pasme sor le col del destrier. (ll. 1329-40)

This dual definition of Marsent as mother and abbess does not produce an essential antagonism, as did the opposing definitions of her by Bernier and Raoul. The maternal and the religious here function in unison, their interconnection reflected in the image of her burning body:

Berniers esgarde dalez un marbre chier;  
 la vit sa mere estendue couchier,  
 sa tenre face (estendue couchier),<sup>97</sup>  
 sor sa poitrine vit ardoir son sautier; (ll. 1325-28)

Maternal breast and psalter are juxtaposed, the two facets of Marsent's character which they represent ultimately over-ruling the image of Marsent as whore projected earlier by Raoul.<sup>98</sup> In her death is found her justification and her vindication, the burning being quite clearly a martyr's end, as Marsent lies seemingly at peace, enveloped by purifying flames. Through violence she transcends the violence of the world of the text.

Despite the religious/ maternal synthesis in the delineation of Marsent's character, there is no suggestion of a Virgin Mary topos in the text. Marsent may be marked as holy in both her narrative life and her death, yet the textual focus lies upon her as a human, rather than as a spiritual, mother. As a mother she, like Aalais, is threatened with an implacable containment in the image of the material female body, indeed, in

<sup>97</sup> As Kay indicates, the repetition of the second hemistich 'estendue couchier' (l. 1327) is very probably a scribal error best corrected to something similar to 'ardoir et graillier', on the model of l. 1364.

<sup>98</sup> Kay, however, sees the two conflicting narratives of Bernier and Raoul as continuing here: 'Whereas in Raoul's narrative the flames of Origny are, by implication, just deserts for the fire of Marsent's illicit sexuality, in Bernier's they are the ultimate expression of men's sexual violence against women' (*The 'Chansons de geste'*, p. 73).

her finality Marsent appears to *be* the maternal corpus. The framing of Aalais in terms of the material, absorbing, secreting body is mirrored by Marsent's potential containment in the mortal plasticity of the decaying body. The image of the maternal breast is invoked yet again as Marsent's body burns (l. 1328), a binding together of the maternal, the corporeal and death which twines together the themes which run throughout the narrative, projecting the inherent tension between the power of the mother (to give life, to influence, to curse with death) and a confinement in the flesh that can equally reduce her to roasting in an oven.<sup>99</sup> It is through her death, however, that Marsent is seen to escape this containment, and to transcend her corporeal confinement.

The framing of the feminine/ maternal character in the *chanson de geste* may ideally be seen to conform to a topos of confinement which restricts female behaviour and contains the mother in the image of the body, corresponding to the genre's own horizon of expectation (to use Jauss' term). The desire of the text to bind its female characters within its generic parameters and to confine them to certain patterns of behaviour is compounded by the ideological divisions set up between men and women in medieval thought -- spirit/ flesh, mind/ body, form/ matter are gendered terms which confine the woman to the body (see the Introduction). In *Raoul de Cambrai* the operation of these gendered categories of behaviour and of representation appears problematic, as the text reveals a distinct tension in its framing of maternal character. This is produced by the pull between the conception of the mother as reproductive sign and as maternal character, between her containment in the passive body and her expression as active protagonist. This split disturbs the narrative, creating a tension which is played out through the opposition of masculine and feminine, between the masculine desire of a text and the strategies which it employs in the containment, or

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<sup>99</sup> Marsent's burning body recalls the burning bacon of l. 1307.

attempted containment, of its maternal characters. The framing and delineation of the maternal in terms of its corporeality does not sit easily in *Raoul de Cambrai*. The text reveals a distinct ambivalence towards the notion of an implacable bounding of the mother in a frame of non-language, in which the maternal signifiers of milk and nurturing breast are seen to represent, essentialise, and, finally, contain her narrative meaning and substance. The inevitability and inviolability of this ideological, political and theoretical positioning of the feminine/ maternal at the juncture of body and void, the (in)articulation of the feminine through the image of a pervious, fluid, disjointed corporeality, remains as open and unstable as the text of *Raoul de Cambrai* itself.



## CHAPTER 5

### MATERNAL ALTERITY : TRANSGRESSION AND DESTABILISATION

In other words, the issue is not one of elaborating a new theory of which woman would be the *subject* or the *object*, but of jamming the theoretical machinery itself, of suspending its pretension to the production of a truth and of a meaning that are excessively univocal. Which presupposes that women do not aspire simply to be men's equals in knowledge. That they do not claim to be rivalling men in constructing a logic of the feminine that would still take onto-theologic as its model, but that they are rather attempting to wrest this away from the economy of the logos. They should not put it, then, in the form 'What is woman?' but rather, repeating/ interpreting the way in which, within discourse, the feminine finds itself defined as lack, deficiency, or as imitation and negative image of the subject, they should signify that with respect to this logic a *disruptive excess* is possible on the feminine side.<sup>1</sup>

The maternal characters of the *chanson de geste* have been considered in terms of their symbolic value when inscribed as sign in the reproductive matrix of the text (Chapter 3), and also in terms of their function as character in the epic narrative (Chapter 4). In both cases, there is a correspondence between the positive framing of the female/maternal image and the masculine demands of society and text. The woman as reproductive sign must be valued as positive in order to be worthy of her positioning as matriarch of an epic lineage, or as mother to an epic hero. As character within the narrative, the mother is depicted as supporting the symbolic structures which order society and epic text. Her function may be read as adjunct to the masculine, whether she is projected as passive and idealised model for the reproduction of the male lineage, as in the *Naissance du Chevalier au Cygne* or *Berte as grans piés*, or whether she is depicted as active participant in the events of the tale, as in *Raoul de Cambrai*. Yet, as seen in the previous chapter, this construction of the maternal character as

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<sup>1</sup> Luce Irigaray, 'The Power of Discourse', in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. by Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 126.

active supplement to the male interaction of the tale is one which can trouble her narrative framing, as the ascribing of influential voice and action to the mother conflicts with the masculine desire of the text to confine her to the sphere of the body, to inaction and passivity. Despite the perceptible instability of this maternal depiction, the fluctuation and disruption of the narrative's strategies of containment, the mothers of the *chanson de geste* have so far been seen to uphold the values of the world which they inhabit -- the coherence and stability of feudal relations, the continuation of the patrilineage, and familial loyalty. If the textual framing of maternal character can, however, be shown to be open to conflicting impulses, then may the mother herself, as character operating within the narrative, also become a potential source of disruption? Are there mothers who are openly subversive of the masculine value system of the *chanson de geste*? Mothers who do not conform to the positive valuation required of them by the reproductive imperative of the epic? If so, what effect may this be seen to have on the symbolic structure of the epic text? And what effect on its framework of masculine reduplication?

The genre's preoccupation with lineage and with the vision of a social and textual continuum in which the son succeeds the father, inheriting name, position and land, may not be as rigid and inviolable a concept as suggested by Bloch, yet family and lineage are, nonetheless, important structuring themes of the *chanson de geste*.<sup>2</sup> The importance of genealogy to the genre, and the space which the epic allows to the mother within its reproductive matrix and within the narrative itself, opens up the potential for the maternal body and the maternal voice to act as dissenting elements in the patriarchal structure of the text. Following the distinction made previously between narrative form and narrative substance, between the mother as reproductive sign and as maternal character within the tale, the potential threat which she poses to

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<sup>2</sup> Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*, Chapter 3. See also my Chapter 3 for further details.

the masculine order can be read as either external or internal. The external relates to the text's intrinsic valuation of the mother as either positive or negative signifier, positioned in the reproductive framework of the text. The internal, to her active function as subject and character within the narrative. Such an opposition of terms (form and substance, external and internal) is evidently not one which can function in a clearcut and self-exclusive way when applied to the depiction of narrative character. The inter-relation and interdependence of maternal sign and maternal character, and the layering of narrative within the *chanson de geste*, is such that the framing of the epic mother is subject to the shift and *mouvance*, to the pull and tension, which can be read as a characteristic of epic textuality. Nonetheless, a division between the idea of woman as sign and as active character can provide a way into the study of the disruptive maternal presence in epic narrative, and how this can work to destabilise and question the hegemonic status of the text's patriarchal order.

## DISPLACEMENT

The most evident 'maternal' threat posed to the continuation of male lineage in the narrative plot of the *chanson de geste* comes, not from the woman as wife and mother, but from the woman as paternal grandmother. This focus upon the grandmother as source of malevolent agency has the double function of signalling a maternal antagonism towards the new relationship formed by her son (as seen in Chapter 2), and also of serving to distance the power and threat which the female character presents, displacing it back one generation.<sup>3</sup> Although positioned within the genealogical matrix of the text, the positivity or negativity of the grandmother does not

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<sup>3</sup> This topos of the wicked mother-in-law/ grandmother does not only appear in the *chanson de geste*. As a popular folk-tale motif, it is prevalent in other medieval genres. See *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Medieval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books and Local Legends*, ed. by Stith Thomson (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde & Bagger, 1955-58).

affect the continuation of the lineage in the temporal present of the narrative. The lineage is already formed, its biological continuation already assured. The grandmother may have a potential function as a mothering figure, yet it is the negation of this which is the focus of narrative attention: she does not operate in a mothering capacity within the narrative. The behaviour of the grandmother, while a reflection of her marginal status, signals the potential for the feminine and the maternal to destabilise and to disrupt the genre's patriarchal structure. The immediate narrative focus on the negativity and destructive force concentrated in the motif of the wicked grandmother and the threat she poses to genealogical continuation is set against this awareness of a distanced, prior maternity which, although dislocated from the character of the grandmother, is yet still implicit in it. As such, the negative embodiment of the feminine/ maternal in the form of the grandmother could indicate male anxiety over the destructive power of the mother -- an anxiety which, in a heroic narrative of lineage, must be displaced and disconnected from the figure of the mother herself.<sup>4</sup> 'That other sex, the feminine, becomes synonymous with a radical evil that is to be suppressed'.<sup>5</sup> Since the mother herself cannot be suppressed, owing to her crucial positioning in the reproductive matrix of the text, it is the grandmother who presents an alternative focus for male approbation, and who deflects the problematic framing of the maternal in the narrative. It does, however, produce the allied problem of the framing of the grandmother herself. Although not focused upon as a mother, does the textual delineation of the grandmother reveal a similar tension to that of the maternal characters in *Raoul de Cambrai*? Is the male anxiety over a disruptive

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<sup>4</sup> This male anxiety over the power of the 'phallic' mother is indicated by many feminist theorists. In *Powers of Horror* Kristeva links the mother with the abject -- that which the child must struggle against and throw off before becoming an autonomous being, before entry into the Symbolic: 'The abject confronts us, on the other hand, and this time within our personal archeology, with our earliest attempts to release the hold of *maternal* entity even before ex-isting outside of her, thanks to the autonomy of language' (p. 13). Men's fear of the feminine is revealed through the social division of male and female, and the perceived difference in their powers: 'One of them, the masculine, apparently victorious, confesses through its very relentlessness against the other, the feminine, that it is threatened by an asymmetrical, irrational, wily, uncontrollable power' (p. 70). It is this power of the feminine, or, more particularly, of the maternal, that must be suppressed before it can harm.

<sup>5</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 70.

feminine/ maternal presence here even more apparent? The question of a masculine displacement and distancing of a negative maternal agency and its concentration in the figure of the grandmother in the *chanson de geste* will be considered through a reading of the *Naissance du Chevalier au Cygne*, which allocates a significant space and narrative agency to the wicked grandmother.

This depiction of female negativity and power of destruction takes the form of the grandmother in both the variant texts of the *Naissance*: Matrosilie in the *Elioxe* version, and Matabrune in the *Beatrix*.<sup>6</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3, the story of the Swan-children presented by the text has its roots in myth and folk-tale, its characters being transposed into the written context of the epic. In the folk-tale a stereotypical wicked 'step-mother' figure, the grandmother of the epic retains her essentially malevolent character. As with the character of the mother, Elioxe or Beatrix, a certain amount of ambiguity is, however, apparent in the textual delineation of the grandmother of the *chanson de geste*. The *Elioxe* version in particular presents a grandmother whose signification appears unstable, her narrative framing open to shift and play rather than to textual closure. This is therefore the text which will provide the basis for the study of the grandmother in the *Naissance*.

Owing to the story's transition from folk-tale to epic, Matrosilie, the grandmother of the Swan-children in *Elioxe*, is nominally inscribed into the social context of twelfth-century aristocracy, and it is within this context that she acts out her allotted role of *mater familias*. Her initial depiction at least marks her integration into the epic framework of the *chanson*. Matrosilie's demonstrated concern for her son to contract a politically and economically advantageous marriage leads Jeanne Lods to

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<sup>6</sup> As previously, all references are to the edition of the *Naissance* by Jan A. Nelson and Emanuel J. Mickel Jr.

refer to her as 'une mère presque bourgeoise', yet, as with the mother of the King of Scotland in the romance of *La Manekine* (Chapter 2), this desire to circumvent her son's choice of bride can also be read as a privileging of marriage with the known, rather than with the unknown.<sup>7</sup>

'Bels fiux, que penses tu? Nel fai si faitement!  
Tu ne prendras feme ensi soudainement.  
Jo te queraï oïsor tot al los de no gent.  
Ci près maint Anotars qui a grant tenement,  
Rois est de grant puissance s'a maint rice parent; (ll. 360-64)<sup>8</sup>

While Elioxe's prophecy of her destiny (ll. 262-67) clearly marks her as essential adjunct to the lineage, Matrosilie's own words place her in opposition to the prevailing discourse of the text. As mother of the Chevalier au Cygne and forebear of Godefroi de Bouillon, first King of Jerusalem, Elioxe's rejection by Matrosilie immediately marks the latter as antagonist of the heroic lineage. In the context of the narrative, Matrosilie can have no knowledge of her future daughter-in-law's significance to the lineage, yet just as its heroic nature is foreshadowed by Elioxe's prophecy, so too is Matrosilie's treachery foreshadowed by her initial opposition to Lothair's marriage. From the beginning she is implicitly marked as countering the ideology of society and epic text.

Matrosilie's reaction to the intended marriage could also be regarded as expressing her maternal concern, yet the depiction of her as loving mother is notable by its absence. Although a certain recognition of the duty, respect and love ideally existing between mother and son does appear in the text and is acknowledged by both Matrosilie and Lothair, the limited appearance of these markers of a mother-son relationship is

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<sup>7</sup> Lods, 'L'Utilisation des thèmes mythiques', p. 812.

<sup>8</sup> This contrasts with the *Roman d'Eneas*, where Lavine's mother supports marriage with Turnus because he is a kinsman as well as a neighbour. The poet of *Eneas* thus privileges endogamy over exogamy, a point of view which is significantly lacking in *Elioxe*.



overwhelmed by the predominant image of Matrosilie as duplicitous and treacherous.<sup>9</sup> Following the marriage of Elioxe and Lothair, Lothair entrusts his pregnant wife to Matrosilie as he departs for battle. The image of the caring mother which she presents at this point appears an expression of social conformity, an enactment of an approved and prescribed formula of epic motherhood in view of her later actions:

La mere vint atant, ne s' atarga noient,  
 Si a dit a son fil molt amiablement:  
 'Fiux, jo t' ainc autretant con moi, mien escient,  
 Et qui tu ameras, amerai le ensement;  
 Se j'ai de toi neveu, joie et devinement  
 Avra tos jors de moi, et esbanoïement.' (ll. 738-43)

The reference to Matrosilie as 'la mère' signals her maternal function, yet this is one which remains unrealised within the narrative. Although her innate motherhood is signalled by the narrator and by her own words, these are subverted and negated by Matrosilie's actions. Following the birth of Elioxe's seven children, and her death in childbed (ll. 1251-73), Matrosilie orders her servant to take the infants into the forest and abandon them to wild beasts (ll. 1328-36). In typical folk-tale fashion, the servant, however, proves the saviour of the children. Once he discovers the contents of the baskets he is carrying he leaves them outside a hermit's cottage (ll. 1375-88), where the children are subsequently raised. Matrosilie then writes to her son to inform him that Elioxe has died in giving birth to seven hideous serpents which then (conveniently) flew away (ll. 1527-30).<sup>10</sup> The fictitious message is framed in terms of a conventional language of *amicitia* and love: ' "Escris dont", dist la dame, "salus et

<sup>9</sup> The instances of a mother-son relationship are few, but they are indicated as follows: Matrosilie kisses Lothair in greeting upon his return with Elioxe (l. 341), and before her confession reminds him of the filial duty and honour which he owes her (ll. 2773-77). In turn, Lothair entrusts Elioxe to his mother when he leaves for battle (ll. 718-20), and also entrusts her with his daughter once the Swan-children have been united with their father (ll. 3025-27). The latter indication of an appeal to Matrosilie's 'maternal' qualities is particularly problematic given her treacherous actions following her entrusting with Elioxe.

<sup>10</sup> The insinuation here is that the 'otherness' of Elioxe was possessed of monstrous or evil qualities; she therefore gave birth to creatures which reflected her own nature. Although the audience is aware of Elioxe's fairy origins, Matrosilie does not appear to be so. It is thus the evil alterity of Elioxe as a stranger which is intimated here.

amisté / A Lotaire mon fil, que je l'ai molt amé" ' (ll. 1523-24), and regret for Elioxé's death: 'Et de çou sonmes nos molt forment adolé, / Ne jamais ne serons por rien renconforté' (ll. 1531-32). The persona which Matrosilie projects through the written word is consistent with that presented by her earlier promise to her son (ll. 738-43). For Lothair she does appear to be, and to act as, the perfect mother.

The actions of Matrosilie are, however, destructive at both the social and narrative level.<sup>11</sup> This doubling of her character, the expression of an ideal motherhood through her language, and the depiction of its opposite through action, indicates the dualism inherent in the medieval perception of women. Her textual positioning as mother and grandmother points to the nurturing, supporting role which she herself articulates, yet, as the narrator's voice points out, Matrosilie does not simply fail to fulfil her maternal role -- her behaviour actively negates her positioning:

Mainte fois en proverbe selt li vilains retraire  
Que taie norist sot; ceste fait le contraire:  
Ne nourist sot ne sage, car ele est de put aire;  
Ains ocit et destruit, nen velt noreçon faire.  
Double mere est la taie quant ele est de bon aire,  
Mais des enfans son fil set molt bien mordre faire; (ll. 1319-24)<sup>12</sup>

As destructive and powerful mother-figure, Matrosilie embodies the contemporary male fears of the actual, innate nature of women.<sup>13</sup> She represents the negative pole of the feminine, displaying the stereotypically 'feminine' characteristics of greed,

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<sup>11</sup> Matrosilie is socially destructive as she attempts to deprive her son of his legal heirs, throwing the question of the inheritance of the kingdom into doubt. In the context of the epic text it is the lineage which will produce Godefroi de Bouillon which she tries to destroy -- a move which is condemnable in terms of his historico-religious significance and his importance as epic hero. On all levels, Matrosilie may be seen to work against the interests of the masculine order through her suppression of the male lineage.

<sup>12</sup> See *Li Proverbe au Vilain: Die Sprichwörter des Gemeinen Mannes. Altfranzösische Dichtung*, ed. by Adolf Tobler (Leipzig: 1895) for popular medieval sayings and beliefs.

<sup>13</sup> The fear of women, particularly in terms of their sexuality, was an intrinsic element in the predominant misogynistic attitudes of the Middle Ages. For details of this anti-feminist topos in twelfth and thirteenth-century religious teaching and in literature see Blamires (ed.), *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*; R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1991); *Three Medieval Views of Women*, ed. by Gloria K. Fiero, Wendy Pfeffer and Mathé Allain (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1989).

jealousy, and deviousness, traits all portrayed through her actions.<sup>14</sup> She becomes the antithesis of her daughter-in-law, whose self-sacrifice furthers the interests of the patrilineage, while Matrosilie attempts to destroy its heirs. Yet the narrative appears to have a distinct problem in this depiction of Matrosilie as a feminine/ maternal anti-type. Although she does illustrate perfectly the negative traits attributed to women, the epic framework of the tale and its masculine desire to establish and extend a heroic lineage, will not allow for Matrosilie to become an uncontrolled source of social disruption. The wicked grandmother of the folk-tale parallels the negativity of the medieval anti-type, yet the epic's inscription of Matrosilie into her twelfth-century social setting renders her subject to the structures and confines of this context. Her social status as woman and mother confuses and obstructs her portrayal.<sup>15</sup> In this context Matrosilie is depicted as subordinate to her son as head of the household, deferring to his wish to marry Elioxe. However, this acquiescence is born of fear rather than love:

Tant con ses fils est fors est ele et dame et maire,  
 Mais s'il fust en maison, n'osast por son viaire  
 Mostrer son felon cuer, qui est de mal afaire. (ll. 1325-27)

And it is fear of her own death at the hands of Lothair which finally forces her to confess her transgression (ll. 2791-803). From this point of confession Matrosilie apparently accepts the nurturing, maternal role which she formerly rejected, and appears as the exemplary grandmother, completely rehabilitated into the social framework of the epic.<sup>16</sup> It may be that the intertextual imperative to provide a superior genealogical background for Godefroi de Bouillon could have had some

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<sup>14</sup> Matrosilie reveals her jealousy of Elioxe by the attempted murder of her children (ll. 1328-36); greed by her theft of their gold chains (ll. 1933-35); and a general duplicity in her interaction with her son. Her embodiment of negative feminine traits can be seen to correspond to the female anti-type of thirteenth-century didactic literature, particularly as depicted by Philippe de Novarre's *Les Quatre Ages de l'homme* (Chapter 1).

<sup>15</sup> In the *Livre des Manières* (c. 1174-78), by Etienne de Fougères, 'women' are treated as an undifferentiated social category and are placed in final position, considered after the lowest male estates. For the position of a married woman in the medieval family structure see also Duby, *Le Chevalier, la femme et le prêtre*, pp. 269-304; and Duby, *Mâle Moyen Age*, pp. 50-73.

<sup>16</sup> Matrosilie gives contributions for the knightening ceremony of the male Swan-children (ll. 3161-63; ll. 3212-13) and is entrusted with care of the Swan-maiden (ll. 3025-27).

effect here, the religious implications of Matrosilie's confession and repentance serving to bring her decisively within the Christian boundaries of the epic and its intent.<sup>17</sup> Yet this sudden transition from an unmitigated wickedness to confession, repentance, and rehabilitation provides Matrosilie with neither a concise narrative role, nor a structured and psychologically coherent character.<sup>18</sup> However, this fragmentation is not without significance.

Matrosilie's rejection of the role ideologically assigned to the woman as wife and mother in both society and epic text -- the support of an established patriarchy -- can be seen to cut against the roles of such epic heroines as Guiborc, wife of Guillaume d'Orange, and Aalais, mother of Raoul de Cambrai. She is projected as a source of potential social subversion and destabilisation through the threat which she poses to the continuation of a lineage and to an order based on the subordination of women.<sup>19</sup> Yet, as noted above, Matrosilie's power to destroy appears ultimately contained. The threat which she poses to the patrilinear narrative is negated, firstly by the actions of her male servant, who saves the children, and secondly by Lothair, who, in turn, threatens his mother with death. The masculine characters of the text appear ultimately

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<sup>17</sup> A Christian implication may be read into Matrosilie's words: 'Fiux, entente, puis que jo m' os si asseürer, / Tu oras ma confiese, por Deu or del celer' (ll. 2791-2). Although Lothair's function as confessor may here be regarded as analogous to that of a Christian priest, he is not explicitly presented in a religious role. The official ecclesiastical position on valid confession may here be of relevance: the Fourth Lateran Council decreed in 1215 that adult Christians were obliged to confess at least once a year to their own parish priest. Permission had to be officially granted by the ecclesiastical authorities in order for confession to be given to any other priest. Without this, no valid absolution could be given. This ruling may well have been in operation before its official sanctioning in 1215, which makes it unlikely that a layman would have taken up the role of confessor, save *in extremis*. Even then, absolution could not be given. Although Matrosilie is threatened with death by Lothair, this does not appear imminent; he cannot therefore be read as a substitute for a priest. For further details see *Histoire des conciles oecuméniques 6: Latran I, II, III et Latran IV*, ed. by Raymonde Foreville (Paris: Editions de l'Orante, 1965), pp. 357-58, Décret 21.

<sup>18</sup> The lack of motivation in the depiction of Matrosilie and the incoherent nature of her character construction can be seen to link her with Kay's idea of Raoul in *Raoul de Cambrai* as projecting an image of violence, rather than a coherent narrative (*Raoul*, Introduction, p. lxi). In a similar way, Matrosilie may be read as an image of destructive wickedness. Her portrayal is, however, complicated by the epic's folk-tale origins and by the negative medieval image of women.

<sup>19</sup> For the economic and sexual function of women see Guthrie, 'La Femme dans *Le Livre de Manières*'. The author views feudal marriage as 'un échange entre la sexualité et le réseau économique' (p. 252).

more powerful and more able to direct and control the course of events than is Matrosilie. Yet the nature of her textual framing does call this containment of her destructive power into question. Her character retains the malevolent force of her folk-tale equivalent, which in *Elioxe* may be seen as repressed, but not dissipated, by the frame and concerns of the new narrative context into which she is interpolated.<sup>20</sup> The appreciable split between word and action in the text's articulation of Matrosilie as maternal ideal or maternal anti-type has already been mentioned. Yet it is this fundamental opposition which signals the problem inherent in her textual framing. Irigaray points to 'the problem of the articulation of the female sex in discourse' -- one which is evidently manifested in *Elioxe*.<sup>21</sup>

The paradox of Matrosilie is that she is constructed within masculine discourse, projected and defined through its linguistic structures, yet can also be read as existing outwith and beyond this textual framing. As a character in the narrative, Matrosilie apparently acquiesces to the demands of society and epic, and is contained, yet her power to commit evil and to disrupt the social order remains active. Framed in the masculine discourse of the maternal, Matrosilie signals the ideal of motherhood, yet becomes the phallic mother of masculine fantasy. The two faces of femininity both articulate the masculine subject position -- Kristeva's fusional mother of primary narcissism, or the phallic mother of the abject.<sup>22</sup> Both are articulated through language, yet are necessarily not contained and bounded by language.<sup>23</sup> The image of the disruptive, phallic mother can be read as an expression of male anxiety over

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<sup>20</sup> This contrasts with the epic characterisation of *Elioxe*, whose feyness is considerably diminished and overlain by the twelfth-century ethos of the *chanson de geste*: see Chapter 3.

<sup>21</sup> Irigaray, 'The Power of Discourse', in *The Irigaray Reader*, p. 124.

<sup>22</sup> See Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater', in *Histoires d'amour*, pp. 295-327; and her *Powers of Horror*, Chapter 3, 'From Filth to Defilement', pp. 56-89.

<sup>23</sup> de Lauretis, among other feminist theorists, points to the impossibility of expressing the concept of 'woman': 'The nonbeing of "woman": the paradox of a being that is at once captive and absent in discourse, constantly spoken of but in itself inaudible or inexpressible, displayed as spectacle and still unrepresented or unrepresentable, invisible yet constituted as the object and the guarantee of vision; a being whose existence and specificity are simultaneously assented and denied, negated and controlled' ('Eccentric Subjects', p. 115).



female/ maternal power, yet it also reveals the impossibility of this power's assimilation into language. Matrosilie is not a 'speaking subject'.<sup>24</sup> She does not articulate herself as a subject through language, nor does she attempt to do so. She rather mimics the masculine voice of author and text in her echoing of the prevailing masculine discourse. As Irigaray states:

There is, in an initial phase, perhaps only one 'path', the one historically assigned to the feminine: that of *mimicry*. One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus begin to thwart it. Whereas a direct female challenge to this condition means demanding to speak as a (masculine) 'subject', that is, it means to postulate a relation to the intelligible that would maintain sexual indifference.<sup>25</sup>

She adds: 'If women are such good mimics, it is because they are not simply resorbed in this function. *They also remain elsewhere*'.<sup>26</sup> This 'elsewhere', according to Irigaray, lies beyond the phallocratic economy, beyond the structure of language.

Linking with the notion of language as the structuring framework of the Symbolic, Adrienne Rich states: 'In a world where language and naming are power, silence is oppression, is violence'.<sup>27</sup> Although Matrosilie may be seen to condone the prevailing structures of power through her compliant speech in the public sphere, presenting herself as the ideal grandmother, she need not necessarily be read as oppressed into

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<sup>24</sup> See *The Irigaray Reader*, pp. 4-5, for a summary of Irigaray's view of women's non-appropriation of the subject position in language. Irigaray's own works elaborate this view, for example, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Minuit, 1977) / *This Sex Which is not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), which explores the notion of the 'self-positioning in language vis-à-vis the other', among other linguistic issues relating to gender (*The Irigaray Reader*, p. 5).

<sup>25</sup> Irigaray, 'The Power of Discourse', in *The Irigaray Reader*, p. 124.

<sup>26</sup> Irigaray, 'The Power of Discourse', p. 124. Irigaray here sees the mimetic operation of women as a making visible of that which is hidden: the possibility for the feminine to function in language. A woman can thus 'try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it'. Matrosilie's mimicry of the masculine discourse which structures the idealised maternal role would, however, appear to be a subversion of this discourse through her verbal mirroring and reflecting back of the image which it projects. Matrosilie is not reduced to this discourse, nor does she function within its bounds. Her mimicry does not signal an entry of the feminine into language, but rather the feminine usurping of this language.

<sup>27</sup> Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets and Silence: Selected Prose: 1966-78* (New York: Norton, 1979), p. 204. Quoted in Dale Spender, *Man Made Language* (London: Pandora Press, Harper Collins, 1992), p. 59.



silence in regard to her true nature. Silence may indeed be read as a kind of violence, but one produced by Matrosilie, rather than one inflicted upon her. It is silence which enables her subversive actions to be initially effective, and for her violent impulse to be acted out. The women attendant on the birth of the Swan-children are first sworn to secrecy:

Plevissiés ça vos fois que c'ert cose celee,  
 N'a home ne a feme qui de mere soit nee  
 Ne sera ceste cose ja par vos revelee. (ll. 1299-1301)

The same is true of the liegeman who takes the children into the forest to abandon them (ll. 1308-10).<sup>28</sup> Matrosilie's silence is finally broken by her confession to Lothair (ll. 2783-840), which leads to the transformation and reinstatement of the Swan-children. From this point on Matrosilie's role in the narrative is only briefly indicated. Significantly, following her confession, we no longer hear her speak.<sup>29</sup> It is possible that, through her confession to Lothair, Matrosilie may also have experienced a change of heart.<sup>30</sup> Her words can no longer subversively mimic masculine discourse simply because she has no more words. Rather than a continuing opposition between word and action, Matrosilie's actions may take the place of her mimicry, no longer serving to undermine the prevailing social discourse, but to partake of it (as they appear to do). Her silence could then be read as one of passivity and acquiescence. The phallic mother is finally contained within the masculine frame of text and language. Yet the very positing of the existence of a feminine/ maternal alterity, which Matrosilie may be held to represent, precludes its complete and ultimate

<sup>28</sup> The abandonment of children in the forest is a widespread folk-motif, see *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, but it also appears in literary form, e.g. *Tristan*, and Marie de France's 'Fresne'.

<sup>29</sup> Irigaray, in 'The Power of Discourse', states, 'Women's social inferiority is reinforced and complicated by the fact that woman does not have access to language, except through recourse to 'masculine' systems of representation which disappropriate her from her relation to herself' (*The Irigaray Reader*, p. 131). This linking of social and linguistic inferiority connects the social and textual representations of Matrosilie, suggesting her repression in both spheres.

<sup>30</sup> The validity of Matrosilie's confession in religious terms must, however, remain open to question.

containment in language.<sup>31</sup> The image of Matrosilie voiced by the linguistic structure which is the text cannot ever be anything other than partial, and therefore incomplete. The cessation of this articulation of her presence within the narrative does not necessarily imply its integration, its assimilation, into the masculine order of the Symbolic, for the silent nature of this presence renders it ambiguous. The malevolent and disruptive force embodied by Matrosilie -- character constructed by and within the masculine discourse -- is not dissipated as long as the construction of the feminine/maternal remains a split and polarised entity, encased in the ambiguity of language. Matrosilie's silence lurks at the linguistic interstices of the text, continuing as presence, and as a disquieting and indefinable element in the narrative of *Elixo*.

Matabrune, the grandmother of the *Beatrix* version of the epic, fundamentally plays the same role as that of Matrosilie in the *Elixo*, yet her character is not so nuanced, nor her machinations so subtle.<sup>32</sup> She reveals an uncompromising hatred of her daughter-in-law, here named Beatrix, not only deceiving Lothair as to the nature of his offspring, but accusing his wife of bestiality, and inciting Lothair to put her to death in punishment (ll. 216-23). Matabrune's later confession is not followed by any 'conversion', as is that of Matrosilie, rather she is executed in retaliation for her persecution of Beatrix.<sup>33</sup> The evidence of Matabrune's vilification of Beatrix is both visible and audible in contrast to the secret and officially silent manipulations of Matrosilie. The suffering which she causes her daughter-in-law, mother of the

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<sup>31</sup> Kaplan points to the mother as abject as becoming 'a sort of phobic object: a form of the abject, the phobic object has to do with the uncertainty over boundaries [...] and with the tenuousness of the Symbolic' (*Motherhood and Representation*, p. 117). The mother is thus set against the theoretical monolith which is the Symbolic. She cannot be absorbed by it, nor fully articulated through it.

<sup>32</sup> It is worth noting that there is an emphasis on death inherent in both the names applied to the grandmother characters, Matrosilie and Matabrune. While 'Matrosilie' may imply (step)motherhood, owing to the link between the initial element 'Matr-' and 'mater', its second element, '-silie', is derived from 'sillier': 'to destroy'. 'Matabrune' is a Saracen-type name composed of the negative elements Mat- (death) and -brune (dark). See André Moisan, *Répertoire des noms propres de personnes et de lieux cités dans les chansons de geste françaises et les ouvrages étrangères dérivées* (Geneva: Droz, 1986), pp. 696-97 for listings of similar Saracen names, e.g. Matalie, Matamar, Matefelon.

<sup>33</sup> Matabrune is burnt at the stake, her soul snatched away by the devil (*Beatrix*, ll. 2535-29).

Chevalier au Cygne and great-grandmother of Godefroi de Bouillon, also marks Matabrune as significantly more culpable in the context of the epic. Her crimes are thus rendered more overt and explicit, as her allegations have a living and sensible focus, in the form of Beatrix. In view of this, 'la loi du talion est appliquée', and Matabrune is verbally and physically erased from both society and text, definitively annulling any question of her continued subversion.<sup>34</sup>

### SEXUALITY AND TRANSGRESSION

Although the paternal grandmother may provide a focus for masculine anxiety over the disruptive power of the feminine/ maternal, as noted above, the threat to the continuation of the epic patrilineage which she embodies is constructed as a specifically external threat. The grandmother may represent the power of the phallic mother, yet the disquiet which this produces in the *chanson de geste* is circumscribed by her own anterior positioning in the reproductive matrix of the text. Distanced from the further continuation and reduplication of the lineage, it is only through destructive action, rather than through motherhood, that the grandmother may have any effect. The immediate maternal space of the text is left open. The question then remains as to the nature and marking of the mother who is inscribed there.

As posited in Chapter 3, the importance of the maternal input into the narrative lineage of the *chanson de geste* requires the mother of the epic hero to be assimilated to the masculine order of the text. She must be supportive of its symbolic structure through both her marking as maternal sign, and through her narrative function. Yet what space does this leave for the mother marked as negative? The deficiencies of the servant

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<sup>34</sup> Lods, 'L'Utilisation des thèmes mythiques', p. 815.

Aliste as mother in *Berte as grans piés* may primarily be ascribed to the treacherous nature of her lineage, but also in some measure to her positioning as counterpoint to Berte. She cannot be fully inscribed into the maternal space of the text, as this is a position already held by Berte. Aliste's negative quality may be transmitted to her children, but since they are of invalid maternal lineage, unauthorised by the reproductive strategy of the text, the significance which this has is primarily to reflect back Aliste's own innate lack and negativity as reproductive sign. The children themselves are not sanctioned by the text, and thus have no signifying value in their own right. Apart from this depiction of negative motherhood as usurping the maternal space, can the transgressive, disruptive mother also *validly* possess this space? And if the epic mother may be inscribed as negative, or subversive of the masculine order, and yet be acknowledged as reproductive nexus between father and son, what effect does this have on the reproductive structure of the text?

The *chanson de geste* of *Ami et Amile* has been the subject of much recent commentary. Unusually, for the genre, the two main female characters of the narrative, Lubias and Belissant, have provided a particular area of study, yet the ambivalence of their narrative relation to the masculine focus of the text does open them up to a variety of conflicting readings.<sup>35</sup> According to Simon Gaunt, *Ami et*

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<sup>35</sup> See in particular Samuel N. Rosenberg, 'Lire *Ami et Amile*, le regard sur les personnages féminins', in *Ami et Amile: une chanson de geste de l'amitié*, ed. by Jean Dufournet (Paris-Geneva: Champion-Slatkine, 1987), pp. 67-78; Michel Zink, 'Lubias et Belissant dans la chanson d'*Ami et Amile*', *Littératures*, 17 (1987), 11-24; Sarah Kay, 'Seduction and Suppression in *Ami et Amile*', *French Studies*, 44 (1990), 129-42; William Calin, 'Women and their Sexuality in *Ami et Amile*: An Occasion to Deconstruct?', *Olifant*, 16 (1991), 77-89. As far as the *chanson's* emphasis on its female characters is concerned, various theories have been suggested. Jacques Ribard ascribes it to romance influence: 'C'est tout l'aspect courtois et féminin -- avec les personnages si actifs de Lubias et se Bélissant -- qui vient se superposer au monde de l'amitié virile et chevaleresque des deux "compagnons", dans un contrepoint qui confère à l'oeuvre toute sa profondeur en mettant l'accent sur la complémentarité du masculin et du féminin' ('*Ami et Amile*: Une oeuvre-carrefour', *Actes du XIe congrès international de la Société Rencesvals*, 2 vols (Barcelona: 1990), II, pp. 155-69 (p. 165)). Zink views Lubias (but not, apparently, Belissant) as a romance character ('Lubias et Belissant', p. 22). Yet, as a whole, the text itself has been read as manifesting so many different influences -- *chanson de geste*, romance, folk-tale and hagiography -- that such a claim for a particular romance influence in the case of the female characters is highly debatable. For the generic relation between epic and romance see Kay, *The 'Chansons de geste'*.

*Amile* is a text which 'represents a fantasy solution to the problem of potential enmity between companions, a solution in which difference is wilfully suppressed'.<sup>36</sup> The focus of the narrative lies on the male bond between Ami and Amile, their unity represented by their simultaneous conception and birth: 'Engendré furent par sainte annuncion / Et en un jor furent né li baron' (ll. 13-14), and by their identical appearance:

Il s'entresamblent de venir et d'aler  
Et de bouche et dou vis et dou nés,  
Dou chevauchier et des armes porter,  
Que nus plus biax ne puet on deviser.  
Dex les fist par miracle. (ll. 39-43)

The above quotations indicate one of the most significant and evident themes of the work, that of hagiography. The bond which exists between the two companions is more than a simple expression of the homosocial relations of the epic text -- the vision of masculine unity and monologism perceived by Gaunt is one which is ordained and supported by God.<sup>37</sup> Geneviève Madika states:

L'originalité d'*Ami et Amile* vient de la nette influence hagiographique -- en particulier dans le récit des miracles -- qui s'allie heureusement au caractère romanesque de l'oeuvre, et de la volonté de montrer comment une amitié humaine peut traduire l'amour de Dieu, lui rendre gloire et en recevoir en retour son plein accomplissement.<sup>38</sup>

Yet although this religious influence is a topos which extends throughout the narrative, emphasising the saintly quality of the two friends, the inherent epic nature of the tale does serve to ground the friendship firmly in the tradition of the male companionship of the *chanson de geste*. The 'twinsip' of Ami and Amile may be depicted as divine

<sup>36</sup> Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, p. 46. The text thus presents a contrasting scenario to such epics as the *Chanson de Roland*, or *Raoul de Cambrai*, in which quarrel or conflict between male companions is a prominent feature.

<sup>37</sup> Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, pp. 51-52. Since the text is, however, fantastical, this model is one which is revealed as implausible. 'In its [the text's] efforts to minimize the flaws in the ideology it promotes, *Ami* paradoxically makes them all the more evident' (p. 52).

<sup>38</sup> Geneviève Madika, 'La Religion dans *Ami et Amile*', in *Ami et Amile: une chanson de geste de l'amitié*, pp. 39-50 (p. 50). Madika notes all the instances in the tale which illustrate its religious nature.

(l. 43), a reflection of the love of God, yet the bond between them is one which operates very much in the social context. They are *chevaliers* who owe allegiance to the king, who fight, who are the object of treacherous machinations, and who both play a role in the homosocial relations of the narrative -- both are given wives as gifts by father-figures.<sup>39</sup> They are thus marked as epic heroes, their mirrored unity representing the ideal of epic companionship and solidarity, albeit an ideal which is marked as flawed and inoperative in the context of the real world.<sup>40</sup> This dual focus upon the unity of Ami and Amile, as a symbolic, microcosmic, representation of the bonds which unite the idealised male community of the *chanson de geste*, or as a reflection of divine love, is one which would in both respects appear to exclude the feminine.<sup>41</sup> Yet Lubias and Belissant have an active role and function in the narrative, and feature more prominently in the tale than is usual for female characters in the *chanson de geste*. They are, however, constructed as peripheral to the central theme of masculine cohesion. Samuel Rosenberg suggests:

Belissant et Lubias, définies plutôt par rapport aux hommes auxquels elles sont associées que de façon autonome, n'existent que dans la mesure où elles peuvent soutenir, promouvoir, exalter l'amitié des compagnons -- ou, au contraire, la combattre et chercher à la détruire.<sup>42</sup>

Paradoxically, the characters of the two women are once constructed as supernumary and as instigators of the action; in contrast, Rosenberg views the deeds of the male heroes as inherently reactive. The *chanson de geste* would thus appear to lay itself open to dissonance and contradiction, particularly in regard to its vision of gender and of gender roles. What kind of space does the narrative then appear to allocate to the

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<sup>39</sup> For the concept of homosocial desire see Sedgwick, *Between Men*; for the woman as gift see Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women'.

<sup>40</sup> According to Gaunt, the monologic image of masculinity which the text attempts to project is inherently flawed: 'If Ami represents the epic dream, an attempt to contain the disintegration of the genre's ideology and its idealized image of masculinity, other texts represent the epic nightmare and indicate that despite the best endeavours of some poets, the genre fails to become monologic' (*Gender and Genre*, p. 52). The 'other texts' to which Gaunt refers include *Raoul de Cambrai*, whose representation of epic decay and death has been considered in Chapter 4, above.

<sup>41</sup> See Kay, 'Seduction and Suppression', p. 130.

<sup>42</sup> Rosenberg, 'Lire Ami et Amile', p. 67.



maternal? And how may the depiction of Lubias and Belissant as mothers be seen to relate to their general delineation as female characters? Female character may be peripheral to the epic's vision of masculine unity, yet the female characters of *Ami et Amile* can be seen to play an essential part in the text's slipperiness.<sup>43</sup>

In their passage from disposable tokens in the structures of marriage alliance, to marriage, to motherhood, Lubias and Belissant have been read as polarised images of femininity, an opposition which contrasts with and heightens the twinned and mirrored sameness of their husbands, Ami and Amile.<sup>44</sup> The names of the women suggest this opposition, Belissant the idealised face of woman, Lubias the evil, the disquieting. Yet the two female characters are not set in such hard and fast ideological moulds as this opposition may imply. They may rather be seen to move in and out of different models of feminine representation, alternately conforming to, or conflicting with, the masculine ideal of epic womanhood. A major factor in the contextualisation of Lubias and Belissant and in the text's differentiation between the two is that of lineage. Lubias belongs to the lineage of epic traitors represented here by her uncle, Hardré, while Belissant's heroic quality is marked by her depiction as the daughter of Charlemagne. Such a genealogical positioning effectively polarises the two women from the start, yet it is Lubias whose initial depiction appears to construct her as suitable reproductive nexus. Belissant, on the other hand, embodies the threat of unrestrained female sexuality. Although daughter of Charlemagne, it is through the character of Belissant that the feminine threat to masculine unity is first posed. It is her unrestrained and deceptive seduction of Amile which instigates the chain of events which threatens to destroy the significant Ami-Amile friendship and to bring about the

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<sup>43</sup> The role of Lubias and Belissant as female, rather than as maternal, characters has been covered in considerable detail already (see note 35). Therefore, only the points which have specific bearing on their genealogical importance will be considered here.

<sup>44</sup> For instance Rosenberg, in 'Lire *Ami et Amile*': 'les deux femmes, elles, se distinguent par une dissimilitude tout aussi mouvante que radicale' (p. 67).

death of Amile.<sup>45</sup> The feminine is here articulated as external to the cohesive bonds of masculinity. It is only by means of deceit and further transgression that Belissant may be brought within the bounds of the masculine order. This is brought about through the substitution of Ami for Amile in trial by combat, yet it also requires that Ami (already married to Lubias) must be betrothed to Belissant. Ami is later stricken with leprosy not because of the subterfuge practised by the two companions, or because of Ami's illegitimate defeat of Hardré in the duel, but because his betrothal to Belissant (although in the name of Amile) is bigamous. It is the law of God, rather than the law of kings which is here of prime importance. The seriousness of Ami's transgression is first emphasised by the poet:

Savéz, seignor, quex chose est de couvent?  
Des que li hom prent fame loiaument,  
Moult fait que fox quant il sa foi li ment (ll. 1803-05)

And then by the appearance of an angel, who warns Ami of his impending leprosy (ll. 1807-20). If the affliction is a punishment from God, then the subsequent miraculous cure is also an act of God. As stated by Madika:

Toutes les péripéties du drame, la maladie, suivie de la guérison, la mort,  
suivie de la résurrection, servent à faire éclater la bonté de Dieu, à travers  
les épreuves qu'il impose à ses amis.<sup>46</sup>

This emphasis on the saintly nature of Ami and Amile thus underscores the prime importance of their unity, the breaking down of their likeness projected as a punishment and a fall from grace.

<sup>45</sup> Belissant enters Amile's chamber in the dark, remaining silent and approaching when he asks her only to come forward if she is of 'bas paraige', (ll. 662-91). They are subsequently betrayed to Charlemagne by Hardré (ll. 726-33). Amile is then required to fight in judicial combat. In contrast to the situation of Lienor in *Guillaume de Dole* (Chapter 2), female sexual activity is here the reality, rather than implication and belief.

<sup>46</sup> Madika, 'La Religion dans *Ami et Amile* ', pp. 44-45.

The pre-marital activity of Belissant as autonomous and sexualised woman is diametrically opposed by the passivity of Lubias. Lubias is depicted as a sign to be exchanged, a silent and presumably acquiescing token to be transferred between men. The explicit linkage of woman and wealth, and the definition of Lubias through her beauty alone, recall the circumscription of the female character of Liënor in the romance of *Guillaume de Dole* (Chapter 2). Lubias is offered by her uncle to the two companions as recompense for his treachery. She is first offered to Amile:

Je voz donrai de mon avoir mil onces,  
Et Lubias, la cortoise, la blonde.  
L'un de voz ferai riche. (ll. 467-69)

Yet the implication of 'L'un de voz' (l. 469) suggests the indiscriminate nature of the gift, as well as the lack of differentiation between the two men. Indeed, Amile in turn passes the gift of Lubias on to Ami (ll. 466-81). Once married, however, the roles of Lubias and Belissant appear reversed.<sup>47</sup> Despite the disruption which Belissant causes to the text's vision of masculine unity and to the containing strategies of the masculine order, her entry into marriage signals her assimilation to the masculine, as her unruly sexual impulse now appears suppressed and contained. Instead of jeopardising the inter-male bond of Ami and Amile, Belissant as wife actively supports it, while in the case of Lubias the opposite occurs. Her character has been read in a variety of different ways. According to Calin 'the nastiest, most formidable villain in the *chanson*', she is alternatively perceived by Rosenberg to have no intrinsic personality of her own:

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<sup>47</sup> Calin views the characters of Belissant and Lubias as intrinsically alike in depiction: '*Ami et Amile* partakes wholeheartedly of the antifeminist tradition inherent in the *chanson de geste* and so much of medieval literature. Sensuality and deceit, incarnate in woman, remain a constant, almost insurmountable obstacle in the path of the male hero' (*The Epic Quest*, p. 74). In contrast, Rosenberg states: 'les deux femmes, elles, se distinguent par une dissimilitude tout aussi mouvante que radicale et qui fait ressortir l'amitié idéale de leurs époux' ('Lire *Ami et Amile*', p. 67). Neither of these views would appear to encapsulate the relationship between the two women, or their relation to their husbands. As discussed above, their textual depiction is more complex and variable than suggested here.

Si la nièce est étonnamment belle, elle n'est de ce fait qu'un instrument particulièrement efficace; de sa beauté ne se développera aucune personnalité qui lui soit propre; d'une rigoureuse détermination familiale ne naîtra aucune autonomie. Ce qui définit Lubias, c'est d'être la nièce de son oncle.<sup>48</sup>

Although lineage does form an important element in the portrayal of the two women, Lubias' depiction as active protagonist in the *récit* does present her as a fully-fledged character in her own right. She does not react against the constraints imposed upon her by her genealogy -- the 'détermination familiale' referred to by Rosenberg, yet in the epic context the very nature of this topos of genealogical predestination is such that characters are, in any case, inevitably bound within its frame. Lubias is both true to her lineage and has a decided personality of her own, yet this double potential for treachery is initially suppressed, marked only by her familial link with Hardré.

Suppressed before her marriage, or rather reduced to the status of transferable, mute token, Lubias is revealed as a powerful and disruptive force following her accession to the role of wife. In contrast to her previous silence, she now attempts to destroy the Ami-Amile bond with words, falsely accusing Amile, to Ami, of having protested his love for her (ll. 501-05), and of trying to seduce her (ll. 1204-15).<sup>49</sup> Kay sees this transition from object to subject on the part of Lubias as an 'access of sexual agency', which appears to have been brought about by her marriage. Yet she states:

It is noteworthy that the object of Lubias's seduction is not Ami in himself, but in his relationship with Amile [...] She fantasizes a rival triangle to those proposed earlier, one in which Amile's love for her would be stronger than his loyalty to his companion (ll. 501-05). The male (homosocial) bond between the two friends would thus be superseded by the heterosexual ones linking her with either.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Rosenberg, 'Lire *Ami et Amile*', p. 69.

<sup>49</sup> The latter of these occasions is depicted with a certain irony, as Lubias does not realise that she is speaking to Amile himself, in the guise of her husband, Ami.

<sup>50</sup> Kay, 'Seduction and Suppression', p. 132. In regard to the image of triangular relationships Kay states 'She [Lubias] serves as a point in a series of triangles in which the significant motivation is between the two men' (p. 132).

Lubias's sexuality therefore does not have the same direct and unequivocal aim as that of Belissant. Its driving force appears to be one of power, rather than of love, as Lubias attempts to manipulate the feelings of Ami and to assimilate him to herself, breaking the bonds of his companionship with Amile.<sup>51</sup> Despite this difference in its motivation it is this sexual agency which links the two women in the feminine threat which they pose to the twinship of the two men.

The question of use, or misuse, of female sexuality relates inevitably in *Ami et Amile* to the structure of male homosocial relations which provides the framework for both the text and the society which this depicts. Not only may sexual power and manipulation be used to seduce and to disrupt, as in the case of Belissant's seduction of Amile, or in Lubias' attempt to break the bonds which unite the two men, but the withholding of sex from an appropriate, socially sanctioned context is depicted as equally wrongful. When Ami begins to sicken with leprosy he is rejected by Lubias, a rejection linked with what amounts to her renunciation of God:

La male damme, cui Dex puist mal donner,  
Que nel deigna veoir ne esgarder  
Ne de son cors servir ne honorer,  
Car de Deu nen ot cure. (ll. 2063-66)

The duty of both husband and wife to 'serve and honour' one another with the body, in sexual terms, is underlined by the authorial voice: 'Maris et fame ce est toute une chars / Ne faillir ne se doivent' (ll. 2117-18). The models of ecclesiastical and secular marriage defined by Georges Duby here come into conflict.<sup>52</sup> Although permissible in legal terms, Lubias' rejection of Ami and her desire to divorce him because of his leprosy is marked as intrinsically immoral, wicked and against the laws of God

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<sup>51</sup> Zink links Lubias' wickedness with her sensuality: 'Sa méchanceté, qui se traduit par la jalousie et le mensonge, avant même que sa cruauté à l'égard de son mari devenu lépreux ne la condamne définitivement, est liée à sa sensualité' ('Lubias et Belissant', p. 19). Both traits may be read as forms of power.

<sup>52</sup> Duby, *Medieval Marriage*, p. 3.

because Lubias herself is depicted as such (and *vice versa*). While Lubias, together with the secular model of marriage, are supported by the protest of the townspeople: 'Droit a ma damme, que mal est mariee' (l. 2152), she is opposed by God's representative, the bishop, who refuses the divorce: 'Si m'aït Dex, li Rois de paradis, / Nel voil par moi destruire' (ll. 2130-31). Given the significant hagiographic theme of *Ami et Amile*, it is not surprising that it is the ecclesiastical stance on marriage which is enforced. Yet this opposition between the two models of marriage neglects the problematic element of Ami's leprosy. The debt of the body did not have to be paid in a case of leprosy, the leper being considered 'dead to the world' and banished from all contact with humanity. Equally, however, the state of 'death' in which the leper existed made divorce impossible. But by leaving the problematic state of Ami out of the question, and concentrating on the opposition between the ecclesiastical and secular attitudes towards marriage, the text underscores the intrinsically evil nature of Lubias. She is allied with the secular against the religious. Ami is on the side of God, God on the side of Ami, an inter-relation which precludes the ultimate defeat of Ami, or of his twinned partner, Amile.

#### TRANSGRESSIVE MOTHERHOOD

It is evident that the emphasis of *Ami et Amile*, although a *chanson de geste*, does not lie on typically epic themes and motifs. Indeed, the generic classification of the narrative has been called into question by several critics.<sup>53</sup> The text is included in MS BN fr. 860 which contains (in order) *Roland*, *Gaydon*, *Ami et Amile*, *Jourdain de Blaye*, and *Auberi le Bourguignon*, a progression which places *Ami et Amile* at the

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<sup>53</sup> For instance, Ribard refers to the text as 'cette "fausse" *chanson de geste*', and points to the diverse nature of the influences upon it ('*Ami et Amile*: Une oeuvre-carrefour', p. 155).



centre of these epics from the *cycle du roi*.<sup>54</sup> In considering the textual framing of the maternal character it is important to note, however, that despite this positioning of *Ami et Amile* the continuity of the lineage is not a primary theme of the narrative. The focus on Ami and Amile as a twinned and coherent entity appears to preclude the epic reduplication of the hero through the extension of his lineage. In a sense, if Ami and Amile are the central point of the narrative, and all else is peripheral to them, they are their own aim and vision. Masculine reduplication is unnecessary simply because it exists already in the frame of the text -- each of the companions is mirror to the other. The text is thus centripetal rather than vertical or horizontal in its articulation of masculine reproduction.<sup>55</sup> The circularity of the narrative itself is such that the two men are depicted as initially identical (ll. 39-43), lose this likeness owing to Ami's leprosy, then have it miraculously restored so that no-one can tell them apart (ll. 3098-106). Within this self-reflexive, self-contained matrix of masculinity (in regard to both the form and content of the narrative) the space which is allocated to the mother and to her reproductive function becomes, perhaps inevitably, ambiguous.

The narrative depiction and function of Lubias and Belissant as feminine sign and character have been discussed above. Although they may be positioned as peripheral to the masculine narrative of *Ami et Amile*, the impact which the female characters have upon this and upon the social relations of the text is highly marked. The threat which they present to the unity and coherence of the masculine order is seen to continue following marriage, yet, as stated above, the supportive/ subversive roles of Lubias and Belissant are now reversed. Lubias poses the threat of fracture and death,

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<sup>54</sup> For details of the manuscript see the Introduction to the edition of the text by Dembowski. For the links between *Ami et Amile* and the other texts of the *geste du roi* see Kay, 'Seduction and Suppression', pp. 130-31.

<sup>55</sup> It is striking that the audience is told nothing of the ancestry or familial background of Ami or Amile, while the other characters belong to specific lineages and are inter-related. Kay's comment, '*Ami et Amile* maintains a balance between the 'vertical' social axis (feudalism, lineage) and the 'horizontal' one (peer group friendship/ rivalry) which is rare in the *chansons de geste*', points to the centralising focus of the narrative ('Seduction and Suppression', p. 141).

whereas Belissant appears entirely assimilated to the twinship of Ami and Amile.

Rosenberg states:

Belissant, volontiers, sans réserve, vient d'adopter une position diamétralement opposée à celle de Lubias. Ses fiançailles, puis son mariage auront constitué, outre une alliance avec Amile, une ratification décisive du compagnonnage des héros.<sup>56</sup>

Belissant has, in effect, married them both, whereas Lubias can never become fully at one with her husband, for Amile is always present like a ghost at the feast. Given this continuing emphasis on horizontal relations; on the linking of companion to companion and on the women who support or undercut this masculine cohesion, it is not surprising that the vertical relations of the text are not articulated with any particular force or urgency. Lubias and Belissant may both become mothers, yet this reproduction is perhaps more important within *Ami et Amile* than for any links between it and other *chansons de geste*.

In line with the nature of the text, a *chanson de geste* with clearly defined religious themes and motifs, there would appear to be a certain dualism inherent in the depiction of mothers and children within the narrative. The maternal function of Lubias and Belissant is not pronounced or underscored. Their depiction as mothers appears an extension of their relation to their husbands and, through this, to the masculine order of the text. The positioning of the two as reproductive nexus is elided, unspoken as the *chanson's* imperative towards the continuation of the patrilineage remains unvoiced. Yet the epic preoccupation with narrative genealogy and masculine reduplication remains as counternarrative. The importance of this epic extension of the male lineage through the birth of sons is intrinsically bound up in *Ami et Amile* with the narrative emphasis on masculinity and the reduplication of the same. This play between the narrative focus on a specific instance of masculine unity (Ami and Amile)

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<sup>56</sup> Rosenberg, 'Lire *Ami et Amile*', p. 75.

and the genealogical imperative of the genre inevitably affects the perception of the maternal space of the text, undercutting its primary reading as limited and contained.<sup>57</sup>

The actions of Lubias as mother parallel her destructive actions as wife. Once their divorce has been refused by the bishop (ll. 2130-31), Ami moves from the town to live in a shelter on its outskirts (ll. 2221-23) where he is entirely neglected by Lubias, who, instead of fulfilling the duties of a wife, attempts to starve him to death:

Or croist au conte et painne et encombrier  
De faim morir, qu'il n'avra que mengier,  
Se Dammeldex n'en panse. (ll. 2317-19)

It is through the actions of their son, Girart, that Ami is kept alive. Girart's calling upon God (ll. 2249; 2288) then marks his righteousness and strengthens the impression of his opposition to the godless Lubias. Although only seven years old, Girart has all the precocity of the young epic hero. He first of all steals food from the table to carry to Ami (ll. 2230-34), then assaults the cook who, on the orders of Lubias, has neglected to provide food for Ami (ll. 2259-77). This behaviour provokes a violent reaction from Lubias:

Voit le sa mere, si le chose et menace,  
Qu'encontre terre et a poins et a paumes  
Le batra tant que i parront les traces.  
'Fiz a mezel, a delgiet et a ladre!  
Ja n'iert uns jors que por lui ne voz bate.  
Ja ne verréz un mois apréz la Pasque  
Que sor le col te metrai tel parrastre,  
S'il ne te tue, il fera trop que lasches,  
Por l'ammor de ton pere.' (ll. 2235-43)

Her physical aggression towards her son appears an extension of the hatred which she bears toward Ami (l. 2239). The desire to provoke Ami's death so that he may be

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<sup>57</sup> The lineages of Ami and of Hardré are continued in *Jourdain de Blaye*: '*Jourdain de Blaye* a toujours été considéré comme la continuation d'*Ami et Amile* parce que *Jourdain* est, en effet, le petit-fils d'Ami, et que le traître Fromont (dans *Jourdain*) est le neveu du traître Hardré (dans *Ami et Amile*)' (*Jourdain de Blaye*, ed. by Peter F. Dembowski, C.F.M.A. (Paris: Champion, 1991), Introduction, p. x).

replaced as a husband is then projected on to his son, as Girart is also threatened with death (l. 2242). This implicit linkage of father and son, the son as reflection and surrogate of the father, taking on his punishment, appears in a similar form in the case of Amile and his two sons.

The encounter between Ami and Amile following the angel's visit and message to Ami (ll. 2769-813) displays the closeness of the relationship between the two men.<sup>58</sup> It also clearly underscores their allegiance to God, with frequent references to 'Deu, le Glorieuз puissant' (ll. 2825; 2836; 2845), and a prayer addressed by Amile to God and 'le fil sainte Marie' (ll. 2867-68). It is then only by means of a long appeal in the name of God (ll. 2878-91) that Ami is persuaded to reveal the angel's message -- how his leprosy may be cured:

Sire, il me dist, je nel voz quier celer,  
Que voz deïsse et volsisse rouver  
Se voz douz fiuls que tant poéz amer,  
Ce est Morans et Gascelins li ber,  
Se voz por moi les voléz decoper,  
Le sanc resoivre dedans un bacin cler  
Et le mien cors de celui sanc laver,  
Adonc porroie ma santé recouvrer. (ll. 2909-16)

Through his substitution of himself for Amile in the duel with Hardré and in the betrothal to Belissant, Ami has jeopardised and sacrificed his own body for his companion. Amile is now called upon to sacrifice in his turn, yet this is a mortification of the flesh which is displaced from Amile's own body to those of his sons. The place of Belissant within this interplay of masculine debt and repayment is non-existent. It is Amile's distress as father and his love for his sons which is marked by the text:

Li cuens l'entent, si commence a plorer,

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<sup>58</sup> Amile calls Ami 'biaus frere' (l. 2826) and recalls the debt which he owes him: 'Si voz tenrai en mes bras tenrement / Je voz doi moult amer, par saint Climent, / Le vostre cors meïstez en presant / En la bataille de Hardré le tyrant' (ll. 2829-33).

Ne sot que faire, ne pot un mot sonner.  
 Molt li est dur et au cuer trop amer  
 De ses douz fiuls que il ot engendrez,  
 Com les porra ocirre et afoler! (ll. 2917-21)<sup>59</sup>

The slaying of Amile's children then becomes an inter-male dialogue played out firstly between the two companions, then between Amile and his sons. The words of the eldest son mark the text's idealisation of masculine unity and the coherence of its homosocial desire, as well the essential oneness of Amile and his sons:

'Biax tres douz peres, dist l'anfes erramment,  
 Quant vos compains avra garissement  
 Se de nos sans a sor soi lavement,  
 Nos sommez vostre, de vostre engenrement,  
 Faire en poéz del tout a vo talent. (ll. 3000-04)

Belissant is not consulted over the slaying of the children, and her grief on Amile's revelation of their death is immense (ll. 3183-86). However, following the discovery of the two boys restored to life by a miracle (ll. 3189-203), her words to her husband confirm the rightness of the sacrifice:

Dist Belissans 'Sire Amile, bons ber,  
 Se je cuidaisse huimain a l'ajorner  
 Que volsissiez mes anfans decoler,  
 Remese fuisse, gel voz di sans fausser,  
 Por recevoir d'unne part le sanc cler'. (ll. 3228-32)

Belissant as mother is thus placed as external to the network of male characters in the narrative. She has no voice in their decisions and does not act as mediator between them, yet her positive depiction as wife, supportive of the masculine unity of Ami and Amile, is carried over into her depiction as mother. The maternal relation of Belissant to her children appears suppressed in order to further the interests of the male bond between the two men and to restore Ami as duplicate of Amile. It is this mirroring of the two companions, posited as the focal point of the narrative at the very beginning,

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<sup>59</sup> This slaying of son by father has an obvious parallel in the Biblical tale of Abraham and Isaac. In addition, the curing of disease by washing in blood is a prevalent folklore motif, see *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, ed. by Thomson.

which retains its significance throughout. The male children then appear as disposable copies of this primary male image, while the maternal nature of both Belissant and Lubias is subordinate to either the love or hate which the women portray towards the two companions.

The fact that the offspring of both Ami and Amile are male enhances the cohesive element inherent in the depiction of the masculine community. The boys are all seen to support the vision of a unified masculine order as represented by the doubling of the father-figure. In addition, the children (of Amile in particular) may be read as extension and reflection of the father's own body -- the duplication of the central figures of Ami and Amile is projected outward to include their sons and reinforces the physical bond between the two men. Their death entails a spilling of Amile's own blood, producing the rebirth of Ami. Through the medium of his children, Amile is then posited as father to Ami, a generation which disposes of the maternal input altogether. Sacrifice, death and rebirth are all set within a patrilinearity which is not merely bounded but turned in upon itself. The subsequent rebirth of Amile's two sons is a divine miracle, an intervention of the transcendent Father which marks the righteous nature of the sacrifice and parallels the regeneration of Ami and the restitution of male likeness.<sup>60</sup> The only role which the mother is able to play in this reduplication of masculinity is that of verbal supporter, and of grieving or joyful

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<sup>60</sup> It is also noteworthy that the narrative topos of the body, and of bodily suffering, which appears in *Ami et Amile* in relation to the male characters does not operate as a form of physical essentialisation or containment in the same way as that of many female characters in medieval literature (for instance Aalais and Marsent, as discussed in Chapter 4). Ami falls ill with leprosy, signalling spiritual punishment, but also the decay and corruptibility of the human body, while Amile's sons suffer death, yet these images of corporeal disintegration are not conclusive, not irrevocable. The significance of miracle in the text is to underscore the righteousness of Ami and Amile and of their 'twinsip'. Unity and likeness must be restored. Miracle also indicates the inherent ideological differentiation in regard to the gender of the body -- the male body is not subject to the same laws of materiality as is the female body; the text does not attempt to confine it within a framework of corporeality. Decay and death can be transcended by the masculine access to the spiritual, an accession which is achieved in the text of *Ami et Amile* through the close male bonding of the two companions -- a bond originating in and justified by God. In this respect the text appears particularly hagiographical in nature.



respondent to the events brought about by the male protagonists and by God's intervention.

If the production of male children may be seen as a further instance of masculine reduplication, it is also significant in terms of the genealogical matrix of the text. Although the continuation of the patrilineage is not a topos of particular concern in *Ami et Amile*, the nature of the heroes' offspring is clearly of relevance to the narrative, and lineage does have an intertextual aspect. Yet within this concentration upon the masculine, the maternal significance and value of Lubias and Belissant appears lacking. As seen above, the narrative space allotted to the depiction of the two in their maternal role is not extensive, and would very much appear to be an extension of their role as wife. Viewed as maternal sign, Lubias and Belissant carry the same negative/ positive valuation as does their depiction as female character. Yet their male offspring are all inscribed by the text as positive. All sustain the masculine order and all appear as reflections of the father. This may well be expected in the case of Belissant, for, despite the threat which she initially poses to the male bonding of Ami and Amile, she is re-assimilated into the symbolic order of the text. Her lineage also marks her as innately valid as reproductive sign. The case of Lubias is, however, more problematic. Her descent from the line of traitors represented by Hardré sets her into a negative mould, and her function as active character does nothing to dispel this marking. Ami's son would then seem to partake of his father's quality alone. Such a reading of the reproductive matrix of *Ami et Amile* would appear valid despite the potential negative maternal input of Lubias. The text's focus on an image of masculinity which is essentially introvert, the male characters as reflection, reduplication and extension of each other, projects an idealised vision of masculine unity in which women have no part. Rosenberg comments:

Toujours est-il dans le cas présent la dépréciation de la femme a un sens qui ne s'explique pas par une simple tradition du genre, car elle y sert à

mettre en relief la valeur exceptionnelle de cette amitié virile dont la célébration est la raison d'être du poème.<sup>61</sup>

While Kay states, 'While women may be excluded from the *matière* of the *chansons de geste*, they are, paradoxically, a valuable prop to the ideal of masculine collectivity'.<sup>62</sup> Both Belissant and Lubias may be seen to function in this way. Although Lubias has an inherent reproductive value, her input is negated by the textual emphasis on a cohesive masculinity. The construction of her character as negative, followed by the denial of its reproductive importance, emphasises the text's focus on the masculine ideal. Even within the reproductive matrix, the negative maternal sign can have no appreciable impact, as the masculine vision of the text reduplicates itself. The hagiographic theme is also important here. As the narrator states, the companionship of Ami and Amile is protected by God. The subversive and destructive force of Lubias will not be permitted to have any influence on her husband and on his bond with Amile:

Les amistiés d'Amile li toldra,  
Mais Dammeldex, seignor, l'en gardera,  
Car moult est saiges contes. (ll. 495-97)

In like manner, Lubias is precluded from having any influence on the offspring of the divinely-ordained twinship. Although the text may be read as ultimately projecting the failure of an epic vision of cohesive and monologic masculinity, the positing of this vision is sufficient to peripheralise the feminine presence. If the transgressive or subversive mother is allowed to occupy the maternal space of the text with any claim to validity, she is, nonetheless, fundamentally negated by the decisive emphasis on a masculinity which is sustained by God.

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<sup>61</sup> Rosenberg, 'Lire *Ami et Amile*', p. 70.

<sup>62</sup> Kay, 'Seduction and Suppression', p. 141.

In *Ami et Amile* the possibility for a maternal subversion of the text's masculine order and of its reproductive strategies would appear to be closed down. Yet although the mother who is openly transgressive may be negated and over-ruled, there does remain the possibility for a different kind of maternal subversion, one which does not operate through a blatant transgression of the maternal ideal, but which operates internally to this. The familial framework of the *chanson de geste* *Parise la Duchesse* has recently been examined in some detail by Sarah Kay, who considers it in the context of the Freudian family romance.<sup>63</sup> As she points out:

*Parise la Duchesse* [...] whilst giving a voice to the child and to the father, and depicting their opposition, is primarily focused on the mother. Parise, expelled from one family, gathers a surrogate one around herself; motherhood is thereby articulated as a symbolic relation.<sup>64</sup>

This focus on the mother is unusual for the family romance, which generally concentrates on the son and on his quest for the father.<sup>65</sup> Although this quest does appear in *Parise*, and the narrative presents a multiplication of father-figures, as is typical of family romance, it is certainly the maternal figure of Parise herself who provides the focal point of the tale. Yet, despite this concentration on a female character and the intertextual nature of the tale -- it belongs to the *Cycle de Nanteuil* -- Parise is not given the same scope of action as are the female characters of many other

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<sup>63</sup> For a study of the family romance narratives of three *chansons de geste*: *Aiol*, *Doon de la Roche*, and *Parise la Duchesse*, see Kay, *The 'Chansons de geste'*, pp. 103-115, and also Kay, 'Motherhood: The Case of the Epic Family Romance', in *Shifts and Transpositions in Medieval Narrative: A Festschrift for Elspeth Kennedy*, ed. by Karen Pratt (Cambridge: Brewer, 1994), pp. 23-36. Plouzeau classifies *Parise la Duchesse* as follows: 'Fondamentalement, *Parise* est la combinaison des thèmes de deux contes: celui de la femme qui, injustement diffamée, est punie puis réhabilitée, et celui du héros dont on ne connaît pas les parents, qui fait la preuve qu'il est bien né, et finit par épouser la fille du roi' (*Parise*, Introduction, I, p. 125). This latter theme conforms to the structure of the family romance narrative examined by Kay.

<sup>64</sup> Kay, *The 'Chansons de geste'*, p. 111.

<sup>65</sup> The term 'filial discourse' is borrowed from Fenster, 'The Son's Mother'. The focus of the family romance on the son and on his quest for a father-figure links more readily with romance narratives such as *Perceval* than with the multiple narratives and paternal orientation of the *chanson de geste*.

epics.<sup>66</sup> Her depiction in fact recalls that of Berte in *Berte as grans piés* (Chapter 3), as Parise's passivity, her self-subjugation to the male figures of the tale, and her religious nature are all inscribed as topoi which feature throughout.

The event which serves as catalyst for the narrative's plot is the attempted poisoning of Parise by the twelve traitors who previously murdered her father, Garnier (ll. 17-20).<sup>67</sup> The poisoned apple intended for Parise is, however, offered by her to Bueves, her brother-in-law (ll. 100-10). His death subsequently leads to the banishment of Parise by her husband, Raimont. The religious overtones of the poisoning episode are evident, yet their interpretation is ambiguous. The explicit marking of the fruit as an apple could be read as linking Parise with Eve, thus suggesting her essential guilt and her feminine perfidy.<sup>68</sup> Yet, owing to Parise's pregnancy at the time, and the fact that this is perceived as a mitigating factor at her trial, Kay suggests, 'Instead of Eve as primal temptress, she is rather Eve as primal mother, offering food to another rather than eating it herself'.<sup>69</sup> This would link with the later importance of Parise's nurturing role, which, contrary to the depiction of the female characters of *Ami et Amile*, is emphasised over her purely feminine role. In addition, the text nowhere else suggests the culpability of Parise. Her condemning at trial is clearly marked as resulting from the treacherous machinations against her, rather than as her own due.<sup>70</sup> Parise may, in fact, be held to represent the synthesis of both secular and religious

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<sup>66</sup> For instance Aalais in *Raoul de Cambrai*, or Guiborc in the epic cycle of Guillaume d'Orange.

<sup>67</sup> As often in the *chansons de geste*, these traitors are marked as belonging to the most treacherous of epic lineages: 'Cil furent del lignaige al cuvert Ganellon' (l. 20).

<sup>68</sup> Kay points to the use of the poisoned-fruit motif in *La Mort le Roi Artu*, but adds, 'In the *chanson de geste* the naming of the fruit as an apple invokes the biblical model if anything more strongly than the episode in the *Mort*. Yet although Parise is convicted, and confesses her part in Bueve's death (668-70), it is hard to discern any imputation of guilt to her' (*The 'Chansons de geste'*, p. 112).

<sup>69</sup> Kay, *The 'Chansons de geste'*, p. 112.

<sup>70</sup> One of the traitors claims to have heard Parise confessing to the murder of Bueves (ll. 223-39). A plot is then hatched to ensure that Parise will be tried and executed – the traitor Milon defends her in trial by combat, but his weapons have been purposely broken and stuck back together with wax so that he will lose the duel (ll. 395-401). This occurs, but Milon is then put to death, 'Vc.m. diable ann ont l'arme porté' (l. 604). Parise thus conforms to the popular topos of the calumniated woman which appears in many other medieval texts.

ideals of womanhood, a validation of her character pointed up by her appeal for clemency following the *judicium Dei*:

-- Sire, dit la duchesce, ce est duez et pechiez;  
Je nel vos forfis onques, si m'aïst Dex del ciel.  
Je sui de vos ançainte, de verté le sachez,  
Ou de fil ou de fille, bien .vii. mois a passez;  
Mout seroit gran dolor si muer a tel peché.  
Tenez moi an prison a l'ostel, chiés Gautier,  
Ou chiés un borjois povre, que n'ai gaires cheté,  
S'ai de vostre pain chacun jor .i. cartier.  
Quant li enfes ert nez, sel faites bautisier;  
Quant serai relevee, si me copez le chié,  
Ou je devendrai noine a .i. de ces mostiers.  
Lai, si proïrai Deu, le gloriëus do ciel,  
Que vostre cors garisse de mort et d'encombrer. (ll. 619-31)

Inscribed as pious and forgiving of her husband, Parise is also seen to place the life of her unborn child before that of herself -- she is the ideal of loving motherhood as well as the potential martyr. Yet this concern to bear the child may also be read as conforming to the epic desire to continue the lineage in valid form. The paternity of the unborn child is stressed again as Parise departs: 'Quele part que ge aille, qu'en remanra orez: / De vos sera li anfes qui de moi sera nez' (ll. 711-12). The character of Parise is thus seen to be contained within the frame of masculine desire; passive and compliant, both her delineation as wife and as mother correspond to the idealised model projected by epic and religious discourse.

An essential aspect of Parise's martyr-like image is bound up in the depiction of her imminent and pathetic motherhood:

Par delez les oreilles fit ses tresces coper;  
An pure sa chemise est li suens cors remés.  
Qui donc veïst l'anfant par son ventre trambler,  
Dont elle estoit accincte bien a .vii. mois pasez,  
Onques Dex ne fist home que n'an preïst pidé. (ll. 646-50)

This textual emphasis on the forthcoming maternity of Parise and her linkage with God and moral righteousness is later reinforced by her implicit linkage with the Virgin

Mary through the circumstances of her child's birth. Parise is alone (apart from male servants who keep their distance), in the middle of the forest, and she prays constantly to Christ as she gives birth. The authorial comment, 'L'ore fust benoïte, d'un fil s'est deslitré' (l. 824) underscores both her spiritual and secular worth. Brought to an almost sanctified maternity through her suffering, Parise's bearing of a son then continues the Virgin Mary topos, as well as marking the genealogical continuation of the patrilineage.

This inscription of Parise as valid in both secular and spiritual terms points up the marking of male character in the early part of the narrative. The inherent split between earthly justice (which goes awry) and heavenly justice (which ultimately triumphs) is signalled by the opposition which the text sets up between Parise and the male characters who conspire against her. Although in the form of a *judicium Dei*, the trial is projected as fundamentally secular, and thus flawed, the only true justice seemingly accidental -- the execution of the traitor Milon. God does not step in to vindicate Parise.<sup>71</sup> The course of justice is subverted by the conspiracy and trickery of the traitors, yet this does not serve to excuse its adjudicator, Duke Raimont, from all blame for Parise's condemnation. Raimont is not innately and naturally allied with Heaven, as is Parise. He is thus blind to truth. Instead, he appears a weak and gullible figure, aligned more easily on the side of the traitors than on that of his wife, without having their excuse of an intrinsically evil lineage (l. 20). Parise's faith, both in God and in her husband, and her righteous suffering contrast with the depiction of Raimont, a depiction which inscribes his character in increasingly reprehensible terms. He immediately believes the worst of his wife:

Quant li dux Raymonz l'ot, a po n'est forsenés;  
Tint un cotel tranchant, .iiii. foiz l'a crolé,

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<sup>71</sup> This contrasts with God's evident protection of Berte in *Berte as grans piés* (Chapter 3). The condemnation of Parise at trial is seen to be necessary in terms of the plot -- the banishment, separation, and vindication all follow on from this event.



He subsequently threatens to mutilate Parise (ll. 703-04), banishes her from the land which is her rightful inheritance (ll. 424-32), bigamously marries the daughter of a traitor (ll. 1605-11), and alienates Clarembaut, the only nobleman who supports Parise, inciting him to wage war (ll. 1657-96).<sup>72</sup> The characterisation of Parise and Raimont would therefore appear to polarise the two, but an amount of ambiguity and vacillation is present in the depiction of Raimont. Despite his actions, which threaten Parise, the structure of the family, and the stability of the social world, he is not blackened to the same extent as the traitors, for his nobility, lineage, and paternity all work to prevent his ultimate condemnation. Raimont's narrative framing cannot, in fact, be fixed as unequivocally negative, for as father of Huguet (as Parise's child is named), Raimont's paternal significance is marked and valued by the text. In contrast to the mother, whose presence can be suppressed and whose influence negated, the father cannot be depicted as invalid, although his position may be queried.<sup>73</sup> Kay asks, 'Why does Parise get off so lightly?', yet it is Raimont whose character deficiencies and culpable conduct would appear to be glossed over by the text -- the couple are eventually re-united with no apparent censure of Raimont's conduct.<sup>74</sup> The exchange which takes place between them signals Raimont's acknowledgement of his wrongdoing, yet he is quickly pardoned, the scene serving primarily to underscore Parise's inscription as the perfect wife:

'Dame, ce dit li dus, comant vos demanez?  
Certes, j'ai anvers vos mauveisement erré:  
Par toz les sainz dou mont, que le me pardonez!  
-- Sire, ce dit la dame, volantiers et de grez.' (ll. 2783-85)

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<sup>72</sup> Raimont can therefore be seen as transgressing against the laws of God and of man. The fact that he actually takes a second wife while married to Parise, and that this is only condemned by Clarembaut, contrasts with the divine punishment meted out to *Ami* (of *Ami et Amile*) for his illicit betrothal to Belissant.

<sup>73</sup> This contrasts principally with the depiction of Lubias in *Ami et Amile*, whose lineage and personality are evil, but whose influence can be over-ruled by the primacy of the father's genealogical influence.

<sup>74</sup> Kay, *The 'Chansons de geste'*, p. 112.

Such is the narrative construction of the parent-figures who form the nucleus of the tale. The positioning of the two within the text's matrix of reproduction is, however, not a fixed and stable concept. As mentioned above, the father-figures of the narrative are multiple, while the maternal sign which is Parise is not contained purely within the matrix of patrilinear reproduction. Parise's son, Huguet, is stolen away as a newborn infant and is raised in the household of the king of Hungary. His legitimacy is here laid open to question, as his origins are unknown, yet his innate nobility is immediately recognised by the king, who wishes to marry Huguet to his daughter and make him the heir to the kingdom: 'Et si ai .i. filluel qui mout fait a prosier: / Il est de haut parage, bien le cuit por verté' (ll. 983-84).<sup>75</sup> It is the personal characteristics of Parise which would appear to be inherited by her son, although in conformity with the themes and motifs of epic patrilinearity and inheritance, the youth resembles his father in appearance: 'Bien ressemble son pere de la boche et del nez, / Et Parise, sa mere, de rire et de gaber' (ll. 1406-07). The moral qualities of Huguet also appear to ally him with his mother -- he resists the temptation to steal the king's treasure when his moral worth is tested (ll. 1051-73). An important aspect of this apparent metaphysical inheritance, passed from mother to son, is the fact that Parise does not breastfeed Huguet as an infant. The milk of the maternal breast is instead displaced, as Parise is taken in from her abandonment in the forest by Count Thierry, who then employs her as wet-nurse to his son, Antoine.<sup>76</sup> Two alternative families are thus set up. Huguet

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<sup>75</sup> Huguet is accused of being a bastard (ll. 1231-34), yet this possibility does not appear to be marked as a particular problem by the text. Huguet asks of his mother, 'Qui fu donques li pere qui moi a angendré? / Car, se je sui batarz, ne sui mie mauvés; / Mieuz vaut .i. bons batarz que mauvais d'eposé' (ll. 1499-1501). Kay, however, suggests that illegitimacy may be a source of greater anxiety in general in the *chanson de geste* than in the romance (*The 'Chansons de geste'*, p. 84). The problem in *Parise*, however, is that although the potential for Huguet to be illegitimate is certainly present within the narrative, the text works hard to establish him as a noble and valid character. The fact that both audience and text are aware of this validity defuses and negates any tension that may otherwise have been created.

<sup>76</sup> Plouzeau has the comment: 'Physiologiquement, la situation est plausible: une femme ayant accouché depuis peu et à qui l'on a enlevé son enfant est en mesure d'allaiter (cf. 944), ce que fait

gains the king of Hungary as a surrogate father-figure (the social superiority of the king conforming to Kay's perception of *Parise* as a family romance), while Parise constructs a further surrogate family through her nurturing of Antoine.<sup>77</sup> This latter is the relationship which Kay refers to as 'symbolic', as Parise's link with Antoine is constructed along the same lines as the metaphysical father-child relationship. The mother is here valued as sign and representation of motherhood, rather than as a biological mother; her function is therefore symbolic, rather than one of physical reproduction through the body.<sup>78</sup>

The possibility for new and alternative structures of familial relations which is opened up by Parise's positioning as symbolic, as well as physical, mother undercuts the text's patriarchal structure. Kay sees the patriarchal framework of the text as innately weak -- Huguet ends up with two 'fathers' from whom he can inherit (Duke Raimont and the king of Hungary), while Antoine also inherits from two father-figures (Count Thierry and Raimont).<sup>79</sup> The relationship between the king of Hungary and Huguet is one of semi-adoption and works simply because the king is of higher social status than Huguet's own father, and thus has more to offer the youth.<sup>80</sup> The bonds created by Parise are intrinsically different, as she not only acquires a surrogate son, Antoine, but a significant relationship is also established between him and Parise's own physical son, Huguet. The three are bound together in a triangular family relationship, a nucleus around which the three father figures of Raimont, Thierry and the king of

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Parise (cf. 1554); mais la décision du comte Thierry de choisir notre duchesse comme nourrice n'est pas motivée (du côté de Thierry), dans notre texte, et va même contre un autre thème littéraire, qui est que la mère allaite elle-même son enfant, pour éviter d'en faire corrompre le sang par le lait d'une étrangère' (*Parise*, Introduction, I, p. 128).

<sup>77</sup> It is interesting to note that, following her initial mention (ll. 955-56), Thierry's wife disappears almost completely from the narrative. It is thus Parise who assumes the position of Antoine's mother from the very start.

<sup>78</sup> Kay, *The 'Chansons de geste'*, p. 111.

<sup>79</sup> See Kay, *The 'Chansons de geste'*, pp. 113-14.

<sup>80</sup> Contrast the many instances in medieval literature where a male child from a noble family is adopted by lower-born or pagan parents -- for instance Julian in *Raoul de Cambrai*; Vivien in the *Enfances Vivien*. These reject the surrogate parents and go in search of their true family and social status.

Hungary are able to circulate, but in which they appear to have no intrinsic role. The link between Huguet and Antoine is immediately recognised by both when they meet as young men:

'Biauz frere, dit Antoinnes, bien soiez vos trovez.  
Ne vos esmaiez mie ne ne vos esfraés;  
Ja mais n'avrai sor vos .i. denier moneé  
Car vostre mere m'a mout chierement gardé,  
Si m'a de vostre lait bien norri et sœé,  
Et je vos partiroie totes mes eritez;  
Certes, ja n'estrai riches por qu'aiez povreté.  
-- Sire, ce dit Huguez, Dex vos an sache gré!  
Ma mere vos a buer nori et alaité;  
S'.i. autre aüst nori, bien m'en deüst peser. (ll. 1550-59)

The link between the two is again marked by Raimont when he reclaims Parise:

'Sire, je veil ma feme, se vos plait, ramener,  
Et mon fil et lo voutre, s'il ne vos doit peser,  
Car tant s'aiment andui ne püent desevrer.  
J'an donrai vostre fil grant part de mon regné. (ll. 2810-13)

Property and the sharing of inheritance are an obvious concern -- just as Huguet acquires wealth and land from a father-figure of higher status than his own, so too does Antoine. Yet the bond between the two youths is not created by the exchange of wealth, or by the giving of this by the father. It is a specifically maternal tie which binds them together.

'Le lait maternel, loin d'être une simple sécrétion biologique, est un lien tangible entre la mère et son enfant'.<sup>81</sup> Milk is the biological and material evidence of motherhood, and, together with the breast, its symbolic representation.<sup>82</sup> The mother-child bond may be created through maternal nurturing, yet it is this tangible evidence of

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<sup>81</sup> Berkvam, *Enfance et Maternité*, p. 52.

<sup>82</sup> The value of milk as a concept has been considered earlier; both physical and metaphysical, its maternal significance is marked by medieval folkloric and natural scientific belief, as well as by modern feminist theory. See the Introduction, and Chapter 4.

motherhood which serves to create the alternative familial bonds of *Parise la Duchesse*. Berkvam comments further:

Il est impossible de déterminer clairement la nature des liens qui se forment entre l'enfant et sa nourrice. Il semble qu'ils sont d'ordre psychologique, nés d'un simple attachement dû à la dépendance physique de l'enfant. Cet attachement inévitable ne revêt pas, dans la mentalité médiévale, le caractère presque sacré des liens basés sur le sang ou le baptême.<sup>83</sup>

Yet the bonds constructed between Parise and Antoine appear much stronger than this general observation would imply. Maternal milk may be viewed as a simple means of sustenance for the dependant infant, yet it is the symbolic element inherent in the image of milk and maternal nurturing which appears most evidently in *Parise*. Although theoretically employed as a wet-nurse, this feature of the plot is not a convincing representation of Parise's positioning in the frame of the narrative. She may function as a nurse, yet the prior construction of her character as noble over-rules any sense of this vocation on the part of the audience. Parise is infinitely more than a wet-nurse. The formation of her character in line with both secular and religious ideals of womanhood, together with her implicit linkage with the Virgin Mary, sets Parise up to be the ideal of motherhood. It is then all the more disruptive of the text's patriarchal economy when this motherhood is displaced and diverted, acting on its own initiative, as it were, to frame its own narrative of reproduction and family relationships.

As signalled by Antoine -- 'Si m'a de vostre lait bien norri et sœé' (l. 1554) -- maternal milk belongs rightfully to the mother's own child, and should work to form the integral bond between the two. Its diversion to another infant does not negate the

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<sup>83</sup> Berkvam, *Enfance et Maternité*, p. 54. This link between nurse and infant is recognised by Philippe de Novarre, 'L'enfes aime et quenoist premiers la fame qui le norrit de son lait, soit mere ou norrice, et sovant avient qu'il ne vuet panre autre memele que la soe [...] Il connoist et fait samblant de joie et d'amor a ceus qui joent a lui, et le lobent et potent d'un leu en autre' (*Les Quatre Ages de l'homme*, p. 2, quoted in Berkvam, *Enfance et Maternité*, p. 47).

primary blood-tie, a move which would run contrary to the whole genealogical imperative of the *chanson de geste*, but functions further to this, creating a fundamental bond between mother and surrogate child. A symbol of motherhood, in *Parise la Duchesse* milk has the power to create ties as strong as those of blood itself. The relationship produced between Parise and Antoine thus appears as a symbolic reflection of that between Parise and Huguet. Although Parise's positioning as surrogate mother may be seen to point up the lack inherent in the original, biological family, this lack is in effect one which relates to the father, and to the text's construction of patriarchy, rather than to the mother-son relation. The links between biological mother and child are not superseded, yet they do appear equalled by the surrogate relationship. Physical and symbolic motherhood are synthesised in the character of Parise, the two sons of the narrative each reflecting a different aspect of this maternity. It is the maternal corpus which is here of especial significance. Huguet is blood of Parise's blood, born from the physical body, yet her relation to Antoine, the 'symbolic son', is also produced by the body. The symbolic nature of this bond, and the alternative family structure which it instigates, may be read as one divorced from corporeality, yet, paradoxically, the surrogate family is also one created by the female body, or, more specifically, by its maternal secretions. The construction of Parise as both physical and symbolic mother is thus paralleled by the function of maternal milk as both physical entity and as symbolic bond. Milk and blood appear interchangeable substances, both projected as dualities by the epic text, both with inherent genealogical and familial value when related to the maternal and to the mother's intrinsic capacity to produce and to create.

It is notable that the alternative family structure posited by *Parise la Duchesse* is one which appears divorced from patriarchy; able to function as a self-sustaining entity. The maternal space of the narrative is filled by an idealised mother, yet the framing of



the father is left open to profusion or inadequacy.<sup>84</sup> The opposition drawn by the text between the positivity of Parise and the potential, if not actual and functional, negativity of Raimont has already been highlighted, yet the destabilising of the father's position appears at every turn. Although considered by Kay in terms of a family romance narrative, it is significant that Huguet's initial quest when he leaves the court of the King of Hungary would appear to be one for the mother, in place of the traditional quest for the father.<sup>85</sup> Huguet's journey is a pattern of rebirth, as he first enters the forest and arrives at the place where he was born (ll. 1314-17) -- 'Venus est au ruisel ou permiers fu lavez; / Il a lavé ses mains et sa boche et son nez' (ll. 1323-24).<sup>86</sup> He then finds the castle where Parise stopped to hear mass following his birth and abduction (ll. 1327-29).<sup>87</sup> The next morning the implicit aim of his journey and its divine guidance are made plain:

Il vint a son cheval, par l'estruer est montez,  
 A Damedeu de gloire se prist a comander.  
 Il broche le cheval des esperons dorés,  
 Il ist fors del chastel le frain abandoné;  
 Jusqu'a l'ore de terce ne fina il d'errer.  
 Quatre chemins roiauz a li anfes arestez;  
 Adonc ne sot li anfes quel part il dut aler.  
 Damedeu reclama de saint majesté. (ll. 1374-82)

There follows a long prayer to God, as Huguet requests that he may find his parents, but divine guidance points him only toward the mother:

Il a a son cheval le frain abandoné;  
 Le chemin vers Coloigne s'an est Huguez torner.  
 En .iiii. jorz horra de sa mere parler. (ll. 1394-96)

<sup>84</sup> Although, as pointed out above, Raimont's fatherhood is not ultimately devalued.

<sup>85</sup> Huguet in fact suggests that his quest is to find his family origins -- both father and mother, yet it is in the footsteps of Parise that he follows (ll. 1279-80).

<sup>86</sup> The washing of the mouth and nose may be seen as paralleling the cleansing of new-born infants.

<sup>87</sup> In the context of Parise's depiction as the perfect maternal character this self-ordained return to Church with no intervening 'purification' is significant, suggesting as it does that her purity remained throughout.

Although Huguet does later travel to find his father, Raimont, this journey is not directed by any supernatural intervention. It is thus the return to the mother which seems to figure more significantly in the narrative, carrying the implication of the search for name and identity usually associated with the quest for the father.

Kay closes her study of the 'epic family romance' with the observation:

Masculine hegemony is, however, to some degree challenged by the promotion of motherhood as itself a symbolic value, even though this never leads to the representation of significant mother-daughter relationships. There is no fantasy of return to a matriarchy: but nor are there any illusions about the harmony and stability of the patriarchy.<sup>88</sup>

Although it is true that mother-daughter relationships do not often feature in the *chanson de geste*, or in medieval narratives as a whole, this does not detract from the importance of the positioning of the mother in *Parise la Duchesse*. The focus of the narrative here lies upon Parise and, ultimately, on the authority which the text invests in her as reproductive mother. The poem contrasts significantly with the other texts considered here, *Elixo*, and *Ami et Amile*, for while the transgressive element inherent in their portrayal of the woman as mother is either displaced back to the grandmother, or negated by the emphasis on a divinely-ordained masculine unity, *Parise* constructs a maternal alternative which does destabilise the position of the father. The multiplication of the father-figure, and his exclusion from the primary mother-child relationship does act to undermine the stability of a patriarchal order which posits the father as the locus of meaning. The further implication that Parise is able to create alternative familial ties without recourse to the legitimising figure of the father then emphasises the maternal space and the power of the mother. Although the text projects Parise as the feminine ideal, her maternity has an innate subversive quality. The paradox which is thus set up figures the mother as a quietly destabilising

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<sup>88</sup> Kay, *The 'Chansons de geste'*, p. 114.

presence which questions the essential viability of the patriarchal structure of familial relations, together with the paternal space of the epic text. Although the hegemonic nature of the masculine order may be thrown into doubt by the silent presence of the grandmother in *Elioxe*, and by the inability of *Ami et Amile*'s vision of masculine unity to function in the world of social relationships, it is *Parise* which can be seen as the epic text which most clearly signals the potential failure of the patriarchal order.

## CONCLUSION

The significance of the maternal character in late twelfth and thirteenth-century French texts would appear to differ from genre to genre, a distinction which is not only signalled by the different amount of space which is allocated to the mother, but also by the extent to which the woman is conceived of as character, rather than as sign. The narrative construction of the woman as sign can be seen to operate across genres, appearing in didactic literature, romance and *chanson de geste*, where the female character functions as an object to be exchanged between men, her value in this masculine economy being essentialised in the chaste female body. Although inscribed by the text, the female character remains inactive, an empty space to be filled by masculine need and desire. This desire may appear to find its focus in the depiction of a feminine fiction which reflects back masculinity's own self-image, reinforcing the hegemony inscribed in the structure of the medieval text, yet this preoccupation with an ideal of femininity is not bound within its textual image. Idealisation of the female body and its function as a sign which validates masculine worth co-exists with fear of women as an unknown and unknowable quantity, and of their ability to act independently of male control. Anxiety over the containment of female sexuality is manifested most strongly by thirteenth-century didactic texts, although it also appears to a significant extent in the romance of *Guillaume de Dole*, discussed in Chapter 2. The strategies of containment promulgated by didactic treatises are seen to focus on the construction of the feminine ideal, yet the underlying intent of this codification of female behaviour is the bounding of sexual activity, a measure which serves to protect the legitimacy of the patrilineage. Despite this concentration on containing and confining, the underlying paradox of the didactic text lies in its signalling of the inherent instability of the feminine ideal which it articulates. The fictional woman may

be set within the frame of masculine vision, but the reality is recognised as capable of operating outside this frame, destabilising the legitimacy of a patriarchal structure which depends on its continuation in valid form. The nature of female character prior to maternity is necessarily emphasised here, but the importance of a future maternity is latent within the framing of the sexually-contained woman. In the secular context of the didactic, or of the fictional text, the female character functioning as idealised construct can be read as referent for her potential maternity, even if this is not fulfilled in the course of the narrative. The maternal function is a social and textual imperative whether it remains implicit within a text's image of femininity, or whether it is openly stated through the depiction of maternal character within the narrative.

The relation between didactic and fictional texts is important in that although both may be read as projecting an ideal of femininity which is inherently a fiction, in the didactic context this ideal is related directly to the social conception of women. The ideal of female chastity and subservience which the didactic treatise delineates thus reflects a desire which imposes the fiction on to the reality. The concerns of these texts reveal a masculine anxiety over female sexual containment which is significant in the interpretation of the more evidently fictional narratives of the romance and the *chanson de geste*. The didactic treatises considered by this study do not depict the woman as mother to any great extent; as long as the woman would appear to conform to the ideal laid down by the text, by containing and restraining her sexual nature, her legitimate motherhood would seem to be taken for granted. In the romance, the woman as sign, as potential mother, is more evident than the mother herself, who does not appear to play a substantial role in the narrative. When she does appear, the mother often corresponds to a misogynistic stereotype, as in Jean Renart's *Guillaume de Dole*. The peripheral nature of the mother and the conception of the woman as a sign in a masculine discourse signals that the preoccupation of the romance narrative lies elsewhere. A potential maternity may be indicated, as in the case of Liënor in

*Guillaume de Dole*, but there is no great emphasis on the maternal role or on the significance of the woman as an integral element in the perpetuation of the lineage. Instead of allocating the female/ maternal character a signifying space in the text, the romance texts considered by the present study would appear to focus on male homosocial relations, either on the horizontal bonds between companions, or on the vertical link of father and son.

Even when the principal character of the narrative becomes a mother during the course of the tale, and has the potential to be depicted as matriarch of a royal lineage, she is nonetheless conceived as a sign, subject to deployment in the masculine interests of the text. This additional image of idealised femininity is introduced by Philippe de Rémi's *La Manekine*, where the woman again appears as a construct of masculine desire, although in this instance she is attributed the role of religious saviour, mediatrix between man and God. Despite the potential for an image of sanctified maternity which is opened up by this narrative framing, the Virgin-Mother link is not exploited, and Joïe's depiction as mother is marginalised by the text's focus on the primary relationship with the father. Both the human father and the transcendent Father, God, provide a theme of paternity which structures the narrative. It is only in the case of *Perceval*, where the text itself lacks closure, that the significance of the maternal input in romance remains open to question, but even here the text's emphasis on a dominant patriarchy, and the foregrounding of the father, signals the suppression of the mother. Although her influence may be read as continuing through the advice which she gives her son and through the text's indication of its innate correctness, the mother herself is marginalised and removed from the narrative.

In the *chanson de geste* the mother would appear to be granted a more extensive narrative role and a greater reproductive significance. This can be seen as a product of the genre's greater emphasis on genealogy and lineage, leading to the formation of



intertextual narratives where the focus lies on the extension of the male line. The mother does not function purely as adjunct to this reduplication of masculinity, however, for the reproductive matrix of the *chanson de geste* allots her a specific position in its frame. Within this matrix the woman as sign has an inherent reproductive value (as has the man), her potential input into the lineage appearing acknowledged and valued by the epic text. This valuing of the mother as reproductive sign is carried over into her depiction as character in the narrative, the two aspects of the maternal role interacting to strengthen the importance of the mother as a whole in the narrative and internarrative structure of the *chanson de geste*.

The attribution of a significance to the mother through her inscription into the genealogical frame of the epic opens up the potential for maternal characters to play a more extensive role in the narrative. The depiction of the mother as an active protagonist, can, however, be productive of a tension which the text has difficulty in resolving. Such is the case in *Raoul de Cambrai*, where the interplay between the inscription of the mother as reproductive sign and her characterisation as an active force in the narrative disturbs the framing of maternal character itself. The problem would appear to lie in the ideological linkage of the feminine with a corporeality which, in the case of the mother, emphasises the maternal signifiers of milk and the nurturing breast. The text of *Raoul de Cambrai* reveals itself as unable to reconcile this passive framing of woman in terms of the body with the evident access to narrative action which the genre allows to the female character.

Paradoxically, it is these same maternal signifiers which serve to underscore the significance of the mother in *Parise la Duchesse*. Although other epic texts may contain mothers who do not correspond to the masculine ideal, and who are not marked as positive signs in the reproductive frame of the text (notably Lubias of *Ami et Amile*), it is *Parise* which constructs a maternal alternative which works to destabilise

the position of the father in the patriarchal system. The significance of the father cannot be displaced by the mother, but his authority as representative of the symbolic order is here questioned and called into account. Blood and milk are seen to operate as elements which structure family and society. Notably in *Parise* the bonds which are forged by the blood of the father and of the patrilineage are equalled by those produced by the milk of the mother. Alternative frameworks of 'family' relationships are revealed as possible, although it is the maternal body which is instrumental in forming either the family bound by the physical ties of blood and inheritance, or the surrogate family created through maternal milk and nurture. The ideological construct which is the maternal body may be used to contain and frame the mother, but the same reproductive body can be used in a manner which is subversive of the masculine order of society.

It would seem evident that the significance of the maternal role in the *chanson de geste* is open to a wider range of possible depictions and interpretations than is that of the mother in other narrative contexts. In the *chanson de geste* the mother functions as an agent in social and narrative frameworks far more complex than a linear genealogy of fathers and sons, where her role would be that of a silent, passive and unacknowledged supplement. It is the epic's emphasis on intertextual and familial connections -- in contrast with the enclosed, self-limiting reproduction of the romance -- that allows for this more multi-faceted maternal function. The genealogical imperative of the epic is seen to afford greater possibility for significant maternal input and for greater play in the genre's articulation of the maternal, on both the syntactic and the semantic levels of textual representation. Indeed, the positioning of the mother as nexus between the signifying units of father and son within the narrative of lineage is of prime strategic importance. The presence and the voice of the mother, or even her presence and her silence, in the masculine structure of society and text destabilises and troubles any vision of a self-sufficient, monolithic language adequate to the

representation of a world and a history. The position of the father as the focal point of a discourse about reproduction and as the primary aim and vision of the text is called into question, countered by the space which is allocated to the mother by the epic text. This recognition of the possibility of a maternal influence and a maternal voice acknowledges the significant role which women do play in the *chanson de geste*, but also troubles our notion of expectation. The vision of the medieval text which we bring to our reading limits our interpretation, Jauss' 'horizon of expectation' leads to the notion of the *chanson de geste* as a masculine genre in which women play little part, yet the role and significance of the maternal presence is clearly inscribed in the medieval text.

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